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BONNIE DUNRAVEN.







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A Story of Kilcarrick.

BY

VICTOR O'DONOVAN POWER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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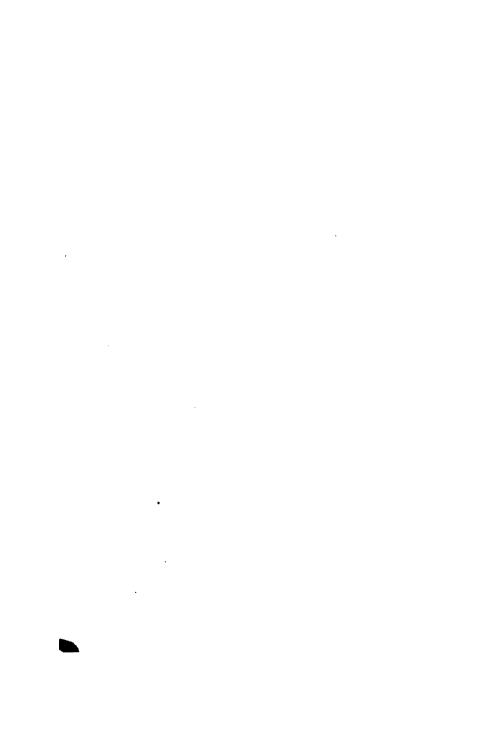
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TO THE MEMORY

• OF

MY MOTHER.

•



BONNIE DUNRAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE OAK PARLOUR AT KILCARRICK.

N old parlour in an old Irish country house, a ruddy fire, with a crowning oak log hissing and sputtering, roaring up the wide chimney, a February storm howling and sobbing around the house and booming in the chimney-stacks, and, now and then, during lulls of the blast, a deep thunderous, crash and roar, the sound of the billows on the rock-bound beach a quarter of a mile away.

How delightfully cosy the old oak parlour vol. I.

looked on this wild wintry night. The lamp had not been lighted, the crimson curtains were drawn comfortably across the shuttered windows, and the fire-light leaped up and down playfully, casting queer shadows of the occupants of the room on the dark brown panelling of the walls.

The occupants of the room were, it seemed, enjoying themselves mightily; for they were all laughing and chatting, and the merry ring of young voices chimed in pleasantly with the low sweet tones of a voice that was no longer young, the voice, indeed, of "grandmamma," who was sitting in a big arm-chair over there in the shadow, and whose small form was now and then revealed for a minute or two in the fitful firelight.

Three young people, the eldest of whom was twelve, were gathered up in various comfortable attitudes upon the big hearthrug, and a slender pale-faced girl, of about fourteen, you would say, was lying back in

another arm-chair, nearly opposite to grand-

The pale-faced girl was not talking much, but she was listening to the gay prattle of her two little sisters and brother, and whenever grandmamma's low tones came in among the other voices, it was pleasant to see how the girl's pale little face lighted up, how her dark eyes flashed, and what a tender smile trembled about her lips. For they all loved grandmamma, and, young as they were, each one of them would, I think, lay down quite willingly his or her little life for the sake of that small woman buried in the big armchair over there in the shadow.

"I wonder," said the pale-faced girl, during a pause in the conversation, "what will Miss Wylde be like. And I wonder how we shall get on with her when she comes."

"I wish she wasn't-coming at all, I do," said Freddy, one of the children; "I'm sure she will be as cross as the cats! Miss

Quinlan was, anyhow, and so was Miss M'Conkey."

"But all governesses are not like poor Miss M'Conkey, dear," said Mrs. Fitzgerald. "Miss Wylde writes an exceedingly nice letter; and now, children, make up your minds to be very good and very obedient, and do everything Miss Wylde tells you. Won't you?"

"We will, indeed, grand'ma," said the younger of the two little girls promptly, whereupon Master Freddy also responded, though not quite so promptly—

"We will, grand'ma."

"And then, you know," continued Mrs. Fitzgerald, "Miss Wylde will be pleased with you all, and, never fear, she will not be cross."

"But," said the elder of the little girls, a timid-looking little thing with flaxen hair and pretty blue eyes, "but, grand'ma, perhaps Miss Wylde is always cross—cross, you know, because she likes to be cross, like Mrs. Flanigan!"

Mrs. Flanigan was the dairy-maid, illustrious by reason of her argumentative powers.

- "Poor Mrs. Flanigan," said grandmamma, she cannot always control her temper, but she really doesn't mean what she says, and I hope none of you, children, ever tease her, or come in her way. I am beginning to suspect you, Freddy," adds Mrs. Fitzgerald, in a terrible tone, fixing her dark blue humorous eyes on her ruddy-cheeked little grandson, "I am beginning to suspect you!"
- "Why, grand'ma?" asked Freddy, opening his big black eyes as wide as they would open.
 - "I think you make your way into the dairy for a spoonful of cream now and then," said Mrs. Fitzgerald.
 - "Indeed, if he does, it is very seldom," put in little Rosa, she of the flaxen hair. "I think Freddy is Mrs. Flanigan's pet," she added, anxious to exculpate her brother from the ignominious charge; for Rosa and Freddy were sworn allies, always played

together on the sands, and sat together at table, and walked hand-in-hand together when they were on their "good behaviour" on Sundays. And a pretty little pair they made; Freddy, with his sturdy figure, his ruddy cheeks, his black eyes, and his curly black hair; Rosa, so slender and fair and fragile, her pretty flaxen ringlets tossed about her neck, her eyes the colour of wild violets.

There was a pause now, and the storm filled up the break with its prolonged moan and shudder. The big log wheezed and sputtered and hissed, as the flames curled around its brown body. The children were, perhaps, tired of talking, and little Meg—a ruddy-cheeked little girl, like her brother, Freddy—had, it appeared, fallen asleep, and converted Master Freddy's back into a temporary pillow.

The pale girl in the chair was gazing, gazing far into the heart of the red embers. I wonder what she saw there? Her dark eyes

had a dreamy look in them, her lips were slightly parted. Sometimes she coughed, and the cough was hard, and short, and unpleasant to the ear. Did this cough, and the alternate pallor and flushing of the thin little face, bode aught of ill? Mrs. Fitzgerald winced and shivered involuntarily when that dry little cough sounded in the silence of the room.

- "Norah, dear," she said, at last, as if anxious to divert her own thoughts from a painful matter—a matter which had become terribly tangible of late—"where did you put that letter which came for your grand-papa this evening?"
 - "Bonnie's letter, grand'ma?"
- "Yes, dear. I gave it to you when Johnnie Sweeney brought it from the village. I dare say your grandpapa will be back very soon now."
- "I left it on his dressing-table," said Norah. "He will go up there as soon as he comes in. I daresay he will be here—

Talk of an angel, grand'ma!—the car is coming," she added, as the sound of approaching wheels came to her ears through the storm.

A few minutes later Doctor Fitzgerald entered the fire-lit parlour, his white hair tossed by the winds, a big ulster wrapped about his tall straight figure; for, though an old man now, over sixty indeed, he yet preserved not a little of the erect carriage and old-world grace of his younger days.

"Upon my word, Mary," he said, to his wife, "I feel myself getting too old for this kind of thing. I have got such a windy buffeting this blessed night as I shall never forget!"

"It is a terrible night, indeed, Hugh. My goodness! listen to that. What a storm! Was it by the cliff road you drove?"

"Faith! it was a case of Hobson's choice," said the Doctor, good-humouredly; "I was over with old Mrs. M'Bride, of Rathnahinch—that woman, by-the-way, always fancies she is in the last gasp. Faith,

I have no patience with her at all, at all! Now, to-night, for example, she would persist in striving to impress upon me, whether I liked it or not, that she shouldn't be alive in the morning. And the same woman, you know, will bury the whole of us!"

"I think you'd better take off that coat, Hugh," said the little woman, "I shall have tea up in no time. Freddy, get a candle for your grandpapa. And that reminds me, Hugh, there is a letter on your dressing-table from Bonnie Dunrayen."

"Is there, indeed? Poor child! Poor Bonnie!" said the Doctor.

"Johnnie Sweeney brought it from the village. And, isn't it strange, I was dreaming about Bonnie last night," continued Mrs. Fitzgerald, "and I thought she came to live with us, as we wanted her to do when her poor mother died; but she was not the same Bonnie, somehow. She was very cold, and grave, and distant, and the children couldn't get on with her at all, and they had

a tremendous 'shindy' one day, and then—such a ridiculous thing—she turned into that queer old Miss M'Conkey, who was a governess at Mrs. Osborne's until last December."

"Dear, dear! Well, dreams go by the contrary, you know," said the Doctor, as he went out of the room.

By the time he returned the lamp was lighting, the old parlour looked as warm and cheerful as you or I could wish, the old-fashioned flowered tea-service was on the table, and the tea-pot—muffled up in a big red and black "cosy"—had been placed inside of the fender, together with a dish of potato-cakes, "grandmamma's" own manufacture.

"Now, let us see what Bonnie says," said the Doctor, going over to the fire, and standing with his back to the blazing log.

It was a rather long letter, and the Doctor read it twice over, from beginning to end, before he made any comment on its contents.

"Poor dear child!" he said then, his-

kind eyes glowing, a quiver in his voice. "Poor Bonnie! I wish she had come to us a year and a half ago. I think she has got enough of governess-life, however, and so she is coming at last."

Whereupon he read her letter aloud for his wife:—

"Ashbrooke, Surrey,

"20th February, 18-.

"MY DEAR UNCLE HUGH,-

"When you and Aunt Mary offered me a happy home at Kilcarrick, last September twelvemenths, I did not avail myself of the tempting proposal, and the reason was, as you know, because I thought I should be able to earn my own bread as a governess, and I knew you had quite enough of anxiety and care without an additional load to carry.

"Well, uncle, I find (for I may as well plunge into the matter without more ado) I find, I say, that I cannot live here any longer. I cannot get on, even tolerably,

with Mrs. Ashbrooke and her daughters. I suppose they would say that they cannot get on with me. Anyhow, I have come to the conclusion that the best thing for all persons interested in the matter would be to part, and to part without further delay.

"Perhaps my Irish prejudices come in my way, and blind me, or, perhaps— But there is no use in considering all the possibilities. The one fact is, that Mrs. Ashbrooke has pained and insulted me to-day more than I can attempt to express in words, and I have decided to send in to head-quarters my resignation.

"Now, uncle, here is what I would lay before you. Aunt Mary mentioned in her last letter that she was thinking of engaging a new governess for the young people. I know of a governess, now, who would, I am confident, suit the children. She is not very cross, and she is by no means a formidable personage. I think she would take an interest in the children which would go

beyond the mere effort to cram so many adjectives, and substantives, and dates of history into their poor little brains per diem. What do you think of these recommendations? Will the lady suit? She expects to be free from engagements very shortly, and her name is Bonnie Dunraven.

"The writing of this letter has done me good, Uncle Hugh. Whenever I sit down to write to you, or Aunt Mary, or Norah, I forget Ashbrooke and its associations, and I am quietly transported from England, beyond the Channel, to a certain dear old country house, called Kilcarrick, on the Southern Irish coast. I listen, and I almost hear the lapping of the waves on the shingle below Liskeelan, and a vision rises before me of the blue sea, and the blue Irish sky, and the rugged cliffs, and the old orchards of Kilcarrick, with their old bearded, twisted, crazy-looking apple trees! No wonder I love that place.

"Well, uncle, I shall say no more now, for

the present, until I hear from you. Give my fond love to Aunt Mary, and to my little cousins. I haven't heard from Norah this ever so long. I hope she feels stronger these times.

"By-the-way, does Bob Grace often look in at Kilcarrick? I think it must be five years since I saw him last. He has the Dispensary now, has he not?

"Good-bye, dear Uncle Hugh. Don't forget to write to

"Your always affectionate niece,
"Bonnie Dungaven.

"P.S.—I have just had a stormy interview with Mrs. Ashbrooke and her eldest daughter. I think I have given the ladies a tolerably fair specimen of what a County Cork girl can be when her blood is fairly up. They gazed at me in astonishment; but I—like a musical-box wound up—went on, and on, and on. I'm sure I don't know what in the world I said. The end of it was that

Miss Ashbrooke led away her mother in a semi-fainting condition. The die is cast now with a vengeance! There is nothing for it but to make my bow with the best grace I can muster!—B.D."

"Oh, Hugh, write to her—or shall I?—by the very next post!" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzgerald, warmly. "Poor child! Just think of her having to mix with such people. And she never said a word about it before!—not a word. What a nice, natural, interesting letter she writes, Hugh."

"Very nice, and natural and affectionate," said the Doctor; "and what I like so much about it is, that she keeps up her good spirits, notwithstanding her circumstances. Poor Grace used to write just such a letter" (Grace was Bonnie's dead mother, and the old Doctor's youngest and favourite sister). "Of course I will write to Bonnie immediately. A pity we did not get this letter two days ago."

- "Before Miss Wylde was engaged?"
- "Yes," said the Doctor. "When is she to come?"
- "In about a week, she said. Do you know what I have been thinking, Hugh?"
 - "What, my dear?"
- "Mrs. Osborne was talking to me the other day about engaging a new governess to replace Miss M'Conkey. Now, I've just been putting two and two together, and I've been thinking that perhaps Mrs. Osborne and Miss Wylde may suit each other, and so affairs would be arranged very happily for all of us."
- "Upon my word, yes! Just so, Mary," exclaimed the Doctor. "Never fear, you thought of an expedient! You are always a great hand at that sort of thing. Faith, I hope Mrs. Osborne will prove tractable," and he laughed pleasantly. "Well, well, well, and so Bonnie is to come to us after all. Do you know, Mary, I look upon Bonnie as being our own child. She is very like what

her mother was—very like poor Grace. She will be a daughter to us, Mary."

And then he sighed and fell a-thinking of his only daughter, beautiful Alice Fitzgerald, who, when only seventeen years of age, had, against the will of her father and mother, and all who loved her, married a scapegrace and scoundrel. It was a weary, miserable story—a story that had best be forgotten, or, at least, allowed to rest undisturbed among the records of the past.

She was dead now—poor self-willed, foolish Alice—dead after a most cruel experience of wedded life. Her husband had deserted her—he subsequently died abroad—some years before Alice closed her sad eyes upon life and its woes. She had come back to Kilcarrick—her old home—she and her four little children; and those who remembered the beautiful, passionate girl of a few short years before, could not believe, as they gazed on the worn, bowed figure, the pallid, weary face, the unutterable woe of the sad eyes,

that these two women were, in reality, one and the same.

The old Doctor as he looked into Norah's pale little face traced there at times a resemblance to her dead mother; a faint resemblance, indeed, dwelling chiefly in the fleeting expression, and not in the features; for was not Alice's beautiful face "the fairest that e'er the sun shone on."

The Doctor's kind eyes were now clouded, and, indeed, had not Mrs. Fitzgerald reminded him that "the tea would be spoiled and the potato-cakes cold," there is no knowing how long he would have remained there, his head bowed, his face saddened, as he rehearsed in memory the scenes of that bygone time of sorrow.

"Well, well," he said, as he took his place at the table, and now his face was brightening up again, "I hope 'Cousin Bonnie' won't spoil you, children. I'm afraid we must insist on the use of a cane, eh, Freddy?" "In that case," smiled the little woman behind the urn, with her dark blue eyes full of humour, "in that case I strongly suspect that the parts will be reversed, and that Freddy will be likely to become possessor of the weapon. When will you write to her, Hugh?"

- "Immediately after tea, my dear."
- "Oh, I am so glad!" said Norah, her pale little face flushing suddenly, her dark eyes brightening. "I have never met anyone, beyond the household here, of course, whom I love as I love Bonnie Dunraven."





CHAPTER II.

WELCOME BACK TO IRELAND!

"HIS is your station, miss," said the guard, standing at the door of the railway carriage with a lamp in his hand.

It was a dark February evening about a week subsequent to that night on which Mrs. Fitzgerald and the children had had their little gossip over the fire in the oak parlour of Kilcarrick. The wind was whistling around the corners of the lonely little station-house, but there was a ruddy gleam issuing from the small waiting-room, wonderfully cheering and inviting on this blusterous February evening.

"Oh, this is Ballydoonan, is it?" said a girl's fresh voice, from within the carriage.

Indeed I should have recognized it, but the night is so very dark that I couldn't very well see. Do you see any sign of a covered car anywhere?" she asked the guard, as she stepped out on the little platform, her arms laden with parcels.

"No, miss, I see no covered car, none as yet, anyhow. But there's a fire in the wait-in'-room, miss, and you can go in there."

Then his face suddenly brightened and he exclaimed—

- "Why, you're welcome, Miss Dunraven! I didn't know you, miss. I hope you're well?"
- "Oh, Edward Roche, is that you! I'm very well, thank you, Edward. I didn't know you, either, until now. Why, you've grown quite a man," she added, pleasantly, and then she passed on, and having seen that her luggage was all right, betook herself to the little waiting-room where a fine wood fire was burning cheerily.

She laid down her shawls and parcels on a

chair, and then went to the fire and held out her chilled hands before the warmth of the red coals and wood.

She was a slender, tall girl, and her figure looked singularly lithe and graceful in the comfortable grey ulster which she wore. A pretty seal cap, with a veil, covered her bright hair, and there was an open frankness and quick intelligence and good-humour in her face which more than compensated for the lack of facial beauty; for facial beauty, let it be at once understood, was not one of Bonnie Dunraven's strong points. No doubt she had good blue-grey eyes, and it was well for her that she had, for otherwise she might have found herself in the category of downright plain-looking girls. But her eyes saved her. They gave a distinctive character to the whole face, and this character was so genial, so kindly, so frank and quick and intelligent, that you found yourself struck at once by Bonnie's appearance, whereas girls with aquiline noses, girls with dimpled cheeks and

chins, girls with swan-like throats and lips like rose buds, failed to disturb your equanimity in the least.

"I wonder they haven't sent the car," Bonnie was thinking, as she warmed her chilled fingers before the fire. "What in the world am I to do if they don't send it? Could it be possible that they didn't get my last letter?"

By this time the engine had whistled discordantly, and the train had moved away from the platform; and now there was no sound save the hurtling of the winds around the little station-house, and the cheerful crackling of the flame amidst the dry wood in the grate.

Bonnie had the room all to herself; at least, so she supposed, until suddenly turning and glancing round (why she could not tell), she was a little surprised to behold a small dark figure sitting on the narrow bench against the opposite wall. This figure was veiled, and so motionless that Bonnie

felt a momentary sensation of nervousness steal over her as she looked.

"Won't you come over to the fire?" she said, then, in her frank, kind way. "You must be very cold over there, and there is quite enough of room here for two."

The figure rose—a small girlish figure—and, lifting her veil, walked across the little room to the hearth. Bonnie became aware of the presence of two dark grey eyes, and a small sallow face—a face showing traces of singular beauty, now faded—and then the stranger broke the silence.

"I expected a car to meet me here," she said, in a clear, low voice, "and I see no sign of it yet. What a lonely place this is."

"It is not very lively, indeed," said Bonnie. "I am in exactly the same predicament as you are. I am waiting for a car, also, and, it seems, both of us are destined to be disappointed."

"I hope there has been no mistake," said the stranger; "if so, I'm sure I don't know what to do, as I am not acquainted with this part of the country at all. I've never been in the County Cork before."

"Oh, well," Bonnie replied, kindly, "if I can do anything for you, I shall be most happy. I am going to my uncle's house tonight, Doctor Fitzgerald, of Kilcarrick."

The small sallow face was suddenly uplifted, the dark eyes brightened.

- "Dr. Fitzgerald, of Kilcarrick!" echoed the stranger; "what a happy coincidence. Why, I am going there, too!"
- "Indeed! Then—I beg your pardon—but you must be Miss Wylde?"
- "I am Miss Wylde! I am going to teach Dr. Fitzgerald's grandchildren."
- "My little cousins. Come, we must be friends!" said Bonnie, extending her hand, which Miss Wylde took with a smile.
- "How did it happen," Bonnie continued,
 that we did not come together somewhere on the line. I have travelled from Dublin, but I certainly saw nothing of you until just

now; and, by-the-way, you startled me at first. I am not particularly superstitious, but I did begin to fancy you were a ghost until you stood up."

Miss Wylde laughed at this, and her laughrang pleasantly on the ear.

"I always feel a sort of dread of strangers," she said, in her low clear tones, "and although I really did feel very cold, I could not screw up my moral courage to the extent of going over to the fire!"

"Well, I am not a very formidable stranger, am I?" said Bonnie, gaily: and, indeed, she did not look it, with her bright eyes and her frank expressive face.

"No. Not very," Miss Wylde responded cordially. "I cannot tell you how glad I am that I have met you, Miss Fitzgerald. I should feel quite *eerie*, as the Scotch say, were I here all alone, and nobody to meet me."

"Well, I am very glad that I've met you, too. But I am not Miss Fitzgerald. Dr.

Fitzgerald was my poor mother's brother.
My name is Bonnie Dunraven."

"Your mother is dead, then?" Miss Wylde said, with a sad little inflection in her voice.

"Yes, I am an orphan, and an only surviving child," replied Bonnie, and as she spoke she was looking down into the small face beside her. How worn it was. What deep, dark circles were ploughed under the sad eyes. What story was written in that small [girl-face, once beautiful, now a mere wreck? To Bonnie—who, however, did not flatter herself on being much of a physiognomist—that face had a story, and not a happy one.

At this juncture there was an interruption to the fireside *tête-à-tête*. A pair of twinkling blue eyes, set in a round whiskerless face, peeped in at the door, opened to their fullest extent with a broad grin, turned aside for a moment as their owner bawled something or other to some invisible personage

outside, and then advanced goggling into the room.

"Welcome back to Ireland; Miss Bonnie!"
exclaimed the full hearty voice of Pat Mulligan, Dr. Fitzgerald's coachman, occasional waiter-at-table, and general factotum at Kilcarrick. "An' I hope ye're very well an' sthrong, miss. I'm sure ye're kilt waitin', but the mare fell lame, miss—sweet good luck may attind her!—an' only for that onlucky ivint I'd be here a full half-hour ago, at the laste."

"Oh, we haven't been waiting very long, Pat," said Bonnie. (Pat Mulligan, meanwhile, was delivering some unintelligible greeting, accompanied with sundry nods of the head, and touchings of his hat with his whip, to Miss Wylde.) "And now we may as well be getting away, I think. I suppose you've brought the covered car, Pat?"

"Oh, bedad I did, miss. It's a rale could night. I'll take thim luggages from ye, miss," he added, indicating the parcels with a motion of the whip which he held in his left hand.

"Not at all, Pat. Go and see about our trunks, please, and get them on the car. I have one trunk, and a portmanteau, and—"She looked at Miss Wylde.

"You will find my trunk on the platform," said the governess. And away went Pat Mulligan to execute his commissions.

They were at last seated cosily in the roomy old covered car, and were jolting away from the little station-house in the wild February night. Ballydoonan station is about eight miles away from Kilcarrick, and, as the mare was lame, the drive was a somewhat tedious one. But, for all that, Bonnie enjoyed the sensation of jolting and bumping along in the wild night, with the lamps glaring on the hedges and on the narrow country road, and, by-and-by, the thunder of the sea booming through the storm. How Bonnie loved that sound! It ran through her veins like a strong current of electricity.

Her old spirit—the spirit of her childhood, which she had almost thought dead—now revived, and struggled to its strength again, and vibrated in her voice, and sparkled in her eyes.

The two girls chatted away almost unceasingly during that wild drive. Bonnie spoke out just as she felt; told Miss Wylde of the old happy days and weeks which she had spent in Kilcarrick, of the long, lonely rambles by the cliff-paths, of the day-dreams on the sunny shingle below Liskeelan, of the wild romps with Bob Grace in among the bearded trees in the old orchards, then of her mother's death, and her experiences as a governess in England.

Anna Wylde listened, and, although she said little, Bonnie felt that a chord of sympathy was already vibrating between them. Moreover, whatever little Anna did say was, or Bonnie believed it was, characteristic. She concluded, during that drive, that Anna Wylde had singularly strong

she was warm, and passionate, and impulsive. Of her own history Miss Wylde said absolutely nothing. She seemed to shun the subject with shrinking, sensitive dread. Bonnie, therefore, came to the conclusion that Anna Wylde had had bitter experiences of life, that mental sufferings, and not any merely physical ills, had left their cruel traces in the circles underneath her eyes, and the hollows of her worn cheeks.

By-and-by, as Bonnie gazed out through the window upon the lamp-lit road, she suddenly uttered a glad little cry, and her face flushed up with pleasure.

"We are nearly at the gate," she said, in a low, delighted voice. "There are the old oaks bordering the road—the dear old oaks —my old friends! Oh, Miss Wylde, I cannot tell you how delighted I am to be back again at Kilcarrick!"

And five minutes later, indeed, they had entered through an ancient moss-grown

gateway, and were jolting along under the oaks, and beeches, and elms, towards the dear old-fashioned house, which was now to become Bonnie's home.





CHAPTER III.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

HE old house of Kilcarrick is long, low, and irregular. I do not know when it was built; but, judging from the queer old winding staircases, and dark recesses, and low, broad window-seats of the interior, you would conclude that the grey old house, with its western side ivy-grown, and its surrounding orchards—each tree a hoary veteran—has seen many a year go by.

The front of the house faces southwestward, and as you stand upon the broad, shallow steps which flank the great frontdoor, you gaze across old trees and fields, and cliff-tops, to the glorious Atlantic which stretches away, away, away before you, until

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the far-distant sea-line cuts against the delicate hues of the horizon.

The house is two-storied, and singularly picturesque by reason of its twisted chimney-stacks, its quaint dormer-windows, the variegated ivy which, as I have said, covers the western side, and the yellow and red lichens, and brown moss, and golden stone-crop which tint the weather-worn slated roof.

The Kilcarrick orchards are rare treats to lovers of the picturesque. They stretch away behind the house in a westerly direction, and are separated from one another by grass-grown pathways, or borheens, over which the gnarled oaks and sycamores meet close, and form in summer-time a thick roofing of branches and leafage. As you wander along these old borheens, with their ancestral oaks and their adjacent orchards, what with the solitude of the spot and the green twilight which broods under the big trees, you seem to have left the world behind you altogether, or, indeed, to be stepping back into the dim days of eld.

And then, when you go in among the apple trees, those impressions are intensified. Such apple trees! How twisted, and gnarled, and bent, and grotesque are their trunks and boughs! The grey moss covers them with grizzled beards. Long rank grass carpets the ground, and in spring-time you will find in these old orchards a rare wealth of pale yellow primroses, and wild blue violets, and wood-sorrel, with its white blossoms delicately streaked with lilac, and golden celandine, and the glossy leaves of the trailing ground-ivy.

What glad never-to-be-forgotten days Bonnie spent in and out among these old orchards long ago! How well she remembers—to this day—certain apple trees which, by reason of some peculiarly grotesque formation, assumed an almost human personality in her child's fancy. There was "the Old Grey Woman," for example; the poor old

grey woman, was she still alive? And what of the "Witch of Endor," a crazy-looking "Kerry pippin" tree, with two ragged arms extended as if in agonized supplication, and a poor old frame tottering in the last stage of paralysis, or was it bodily torture? Little Bonnie used, long ago, to fancy that the "Witch of Endor" was burning at the stake, and that those terrible outstretched arms were appealing for mercy.

There were many others, too—"Hump-backed Joe," and so forth. How well she remembered them all!

All these reminiscences crowded rapidly into Bonnie's mind as the covered car jolted under the old trees, bringing her nearer every moment to the house she loved.

At last they turned a corner of the drive, and behold! there was the old house looming darkly ahead of them, and a ruddy glow from the open front-door streamed out cheerfully upon the broad stone steps. And now quick little footsteps are heard.

'Children's voices ring out on the night air.

"Cousin Bonnie! Cousin Bonnie! Welcome home!"

Bonnie could never remember very clearly what followed. She had a confused recollection of clinging arms about her neck, and promiscuous kissing processes, and a warmth and big-heartedness of welcome which filled her bright eyes with tears. Matters did not begin to settle down into even comparative order and method until Bonnie and Anna Wylde had taken off their travelling attire, and had come down to the oak parlour where a splendid wood fire roared up the old chimney, and the aroma of tea and hot cakes was in the room.

"I can hardly realize that I am actually in the oak parlour of Kilcarrick again," said Bonnie. "I fancy that I shall wake up byand-by and find myself at Ashbrooke."

"And I can hardly believe you are here either," whispered Norah, whose pale little

face was all lighted up as she spoke. "It seems almost too good to be true."

Mrs. Fitzgerald, in the meantime, was talking to Miss Wylde, and endeavouring, in her kind sympathetic way, to make the governess as much at home as possible. She perceived at once that Anna Wylde was not endowed with that easy reliance upon herself which carries so many people smoothly and gracefully through society. The governess was, indeed, painfully reserved and silent at first. She seemed to shrink. physically as well as mentally, from the unknown faces which surrounded her. It was no false pride nor gloom of temperament which occasioned this reserve, as Mrs. Fitzgerald very well knew. It was the extreme sensitiveness of Anna Wylde, a feeling which character amounted to almost a passion. Mrs. Fitzgerald, with her quick sympathies and her kindly Irish heart, discerned this very speedily, and was now exerting herself to the utmost to do away

with it. And her efforts were crowned with success. By the time they had all gathered around the tea table, Anna Wylde felt as though a cruel load were removed from off her shoulders, and—with a strange gladness, a gladness toned down by the pain of her own childhood's memories—she joined in the laughter and the homely genial conversation of the others.

It was truly a happy tea table. The children were in high glee. Master Freddy had contrived to get near to Cousin Bonnie, and he administered a surreptitious pinch, now and then, by way of an effective indication of his presence. Bonnie acknowthese small marks ledged of attention by sundry wringings of the young gentleman's brown ears, whereat there was a great shout of laughter from the two little girls, to which outburst Master Freddy cordially added the full force of his healthy young lungs.

But the great event of the night came

round, when Bonnie quietly withdrew from the parlour after tea, and returned betimes laden with some mysterious parcels, which she deposited on the table, much to the interest and mental perplexity of the children.

What in the world, now, did these neatly-papered parcels contain?

Bonnie was smiling and looking very happy as she uncorded them one by one.

Then, at last, the glad truth burst on the children's minds. Cousin Bonnie had brought a present to each of them! And such was in fact the case. A prettily bound volume of old ballad poetry for Norah (who loved reading); a handsome and aristocratic-looking doll, with beautiful blue eyes and scarlet lips, for little Meg; an ebony work-box, fully furnished with needles, reels, thimbles, and so forth, for Rosa; and, lastly, a wooden gun for Master Freddy.

It would do your heart good to see the delight of the young people over these price-

less treasures. What a gratified quiet smile passed over Norah's pale little face as she fondly turned over the leaves of her book. How little Meg's bonnie cheeks kindled and glowed as she critically scrutinized the self-satisfied smile of the aristocratic beauty of the scarlet lips. As for Rosa, she was eagerly exhibiting the contents of her work-box for "grand'ma's" delectation, and Master Freddy had made off to the kitchen, whence sundry cries of dismay were presently heard in the parlour, and betokened that the maids were under the steady fire of the young gentleman's breech-loader.

"Why, Bonnie," said Mrs. Fitzgerald, who was now admiring Meg's doll, "all these things must have cost you a small fortune, my dear. What a pretty doll! But this splendid pink dress will not be very serviceable, I am afraid, for country wear. Eh, Meg?"

"Oh, no, grand'ma. I'll make another dress for her," said little Meg, promptly,

whereupon she grasped the aristocratic beauty by the waist, and forced that lady to stalk, in a most undignified manner, backwards and forwards upon the table.

By-and-by they all gathered around the fireside, and Bonnie found herself kneeling on the hearth rug, her chin supported on her hand—just as she was wont to kneel long ago. Were the past years realities, or was this a dream? And now when the old Doctor laid his wrinkled hand on the girl's bright hair, and turned her face towards him-to-"have a good look at her," as he said— Bonnie began to almost believe that she had never been really in Ashbrooke at all, and that those two or three miserable yearsduring her poor mother's illness and death, and her own hard life beyond the Channelwere merely confused visions of things which had never actually occurred.

"You must be very tired and sleepy after all your travelling, my dear," said the Doctor, when he had taken that "good look" into his niece's frank face, "and you, too, Miss Wylde."

"I don't know about Miss Wylde," Bonnie responded, "but I can answer for myself that I am not the least bit in the world tired or sleepy. How could I? You can't imagine, Uncle Hugh, the new life which has been instilled into me since I stepped across the threshold of the front door. I feel five years younger, for one thing."

"Please God, you will always have a happy home here, my dear," said the Doctor, patting that small bright head of his niece's with a tender lingering hand. "You should have come to us a year and a half ago, Bonnie. We would have received you with open arms, my dear."

"Indeed, I know that too well, Uncle Hugh, but—but I thought I could get on better than I did. I don't care to talk of it at all. Let us try to forget it altogether. I was not happy at Ashbrooke, Uncle Hugh.

But it is all over now, and thank God I am young and strong and able to enjoy Kilcarrick the more thoroughly by the very force of contrast, don't you see, uncle. After all, one can never fully appreciate home until one has lived elsewhere, and seen other countries, and mixed with other people. I shall never forget the pang of delight—a delight that was almost pain, uncle—which thrilled through and through me when I caught sight of the Irish coast a day or two ago. I felt as though I could stretch out my arms and gather in that pale blue line of land to my heart. Oh, uncle, you can't fathom my love for Ireland and Kilcarrick, and you and aunt and the children, and the old orchards, and the old oaks, and the sea, and-and-"

She broke off with a little laugh, but there was something very like tears in her eyes now.

"I know, I know, Bonnie, my dear," saidthe old Doctor, still patting her head, and now his hand had a more lingering pressure upon her hair. "You remind me more than ever of your poor mother, my dear. You spoke like her then. Why, I have heard her talk so a thousand times. You are a Fitzgerald, Bonnie. You are a Fitzgerald to the back bone!"

Bonnie looked up into her uncle's face as he spoke the last words. What a kind, noble face he had, she thought. How tender, how honest, how handsome, too. What good, kind, grey eyes; what a broad intellectual forehead; what open genial expression in every feature. This man won you at once. You looked into his face, and you trusted him there and then.

The little talk between uncle and niece had been carried on in a very low tone of voice, dropping at times to a whisper; and, in the meantime, Mrs. Fitzgerald and Anna Wylde were engaged, at the other side of the hearth, in what seemed to be a rather earnest conversation.

Mrs. Fitzgerald had introduced to Miss Wylde the subject of Mrs. Osborne, and had explained all about Bonnie, and how she wished so much to be allowed to take charge of the children.

"You see, Miss Wylde," said the little woman with the dark blue eyes, and the black wavy hair so plentifully streaked with grey, "my niece's letter did not come until after you had appointed the day of your arrival. Now, of course, it rests entirely with yourself and your own wishes whether you leave us or not, Mrs. Osborne is a very nice woman, indeed very ladylike, and all that. She is a little bit hyppish, you know." said the little woman with a smile, "and then she likes to be humoured. But it is a harmless hobby, when all is said. And her children are very quiet, good little things; not like my wild Freddy, for example. dare say you will see Mrs. Osborne tomorrow, perhaps, and then you can judge for vourself."

- "I should be very sorry, indeed," said Anna Wylde, "to steal away Miss Dunraven's little charges from her."
- "But you musn't decide upon anything contrary to your own wishes, Miss Wylde," said Mrs. Fitzgerald, who was far too kindhearted to wish to secure profit for herself at the cost of another's unhappiness. "And now really, you must be very tired. You've had a very long journey. It is a shame for me to keep you here so late. And you, too, Bonnie. Why, neither of you must dream of getting up to-morrow for breakfast. You shall have your breakfasts in bed."
- "Breakfast in bed, Aunt Mary!" exclaimed Bonnie, jumping up, as she spoke, from her kneeling position on the hearth, "Why, I intend to have a peep at the orchards, and a chat with Kitty Maguire and Mrs. Flanigan before breakfast. It would never do to inaugurate my first morning at Kilcarrick in such a lazy fashion."
 - "Oh, it's all very well to plan out all that

to-night," said the little woman, goodhumouredly; "but wait until we see."

And so, at last, they all said good-night, and were shut up in their rooms, and the business of that night was over.

Bonnie, however, did not close her eyes until the small hours. She lay in the old-fashioned bedstead in the cosy little room which she had occupied as a child, and had insisted upon getting now again. There was a pleasant gleam of fire-light in the room, and the storm howled without, and thudded at times against the window panes, and, to Bonnie, every sight and sound was keenly welcome and delightful.

No wonder she looked upon Kilcarrick as being her home. And what a happy home too! She had no recollection of a happy home of her own, indeed. Her memories of early childhood were faint and few, and had long since arranged themselves into bald generalities in the girl's mind.

Her father was a gay spendthrift—" hand-

some Harry Dunraven," as he was called by some—and he was perfectly conscious of his beauty and his fine figure, and the graceful flow and variety of his conversation. He was not, in all ways, a bad husband, because he really loved—in his own selfish, frivolous manner—poor Grace Fitzgerald. But he was a reckless, happy-go-lucky soldier of fortune, and, having lived like a young prince for a few brief years after his marriage, suddenly disappeared from society, and was heard of no more there. The man became a bankrupt. House, furniture, carriagesall were sold. He took to drinking—his only solace, I suppose, now—and died in less than a twelvementh after his downfall.

His widow had happily a small annuity settled upon her for life, and she retired to a lonely seaside village, and there lived with her one little girl, until she, too,

passed,

To where beyond these voices there is peace.

Bonnie, therefore, had not, as others have, vol. i.

any fond memories of home to fall back upon in the after years, and dream of during the long, lonesome nights, when the wind is wailing and the rain is pattering, and when home and home's dear ones have alike passed away for ever more. She had never had a home, properly so called. She had never had any little sisters or brothers; one little brother, indeed, had died when a baby. The girl oftentimes longed—with a yearning agony of longing—that he had not died. How overjoyed she should be to have a brother now.

Thus it was that Kilcarrick had always appeared to Bonnie's mind as a substitute for home; and by-and-by she forgot that it was only a substitute, and it grew into a glad reality. It was home; surely it was home. And her uncle and aunt—what father and mother could be kinder? As a child she had spent long weeks and months at the old house, and had, as you know, romped in the orchards and made companions of the trees,

and gathered "nunnies" on the shingle below Liskeelan.

All these old memories were thronging fast and thick into Bonnie's active brain as she lay awake in her cosy little room on this first happy night in Kilcarrick. By-and-by, her thoughts became strangely confused. Vague, conflicting visions flitted through her mind, of Mrs. Ashbrooke, and the stewardess on the English steamboat, and Pat Mulligan, and the "Witch of Endor" in the orchard. She shook herself up with a start, and then laughed at the absurdities which had gathered into her mind. But a fresh supply was at hand, and so Bonnie fairly succumbed to the irresistible.

And so it came to pass that Mrs. Fitz-gerald's prediction concerning her niece's early rising was literally verified. Bonnie, sitting up in bed in great perturbation of spirit the next morning, was horrified beyond expression to hear the deep-toned clock proclaim in measured strokes the hour of ten!

Well, the only thing for it now was to humble herself unto the dust, and, with the best possible grace, strive to enjoy this temptingly browned toast and this creamy tea which the triumphant little woman of the dark blue eyes has just brought into the room.





CHAPTER IV.

FAREWELL.

RS. OSBORNE and two of her little girls called at Kilcarrick the day after Bonnie's arrival, and, while the children amused themselves—in their own demure fashion—about the grounds with Bonnie's little cousins, their mother and Miss Wylde were closeted together in the drawing-room, for a good half hour or so at least.

At the expiration of that time the little girls were called in and presented to Anna Wylde by their mother.

Mrs. Osborne was a refined-looking, delicately-featured woman, with a sweet and gentle face, and the little girls resembled her. They were quiet, timid little things, and they responded to Anna Wylde's brief questions with a demureness and monotony of voice, expression and attitude, painfully automaton-like.

Poor old Miss M'Conkey, their former governess, used to say that Mrs. Osborne and her children wanted, each and all, a thoroughly good shaking.

"They are very amiable and very good, and very kind, and all that—according to their lights," she used to say; "but Lord bless you! they have no more life in them than so many moles!"

And she was not very far astray, indeed—poor desperate lady.

"Now, Lucy and Minnie," said Mrs. Osborne, in her soft voice, "you must both of you be very obedient and very attentive to Miss Wylde. She is coming home with us, and she will be very fond of you if you prove yourselves worthy of her regard; but if not, of course she must be very strict—very, and then you and she will fall out—" and so forth.

"Do you think you will be able to come with us now, Miss Wylde?" asked Mrs. Osborne, presently. "Of course, if it be not perfectly convenient for you to come to-day, the car shall be sent here any time you like."

"I shall be ready to go in ten minutes," Anna said, and then she withdrew to prepare for her departure.

She locked herself into her room and set about arranging her trunk, which she had tossed up a little last night. She looked tired to-day, and her small sallow face was more colourless than usual. In her heart, she did not care to go to Mrs. Osborne's at all. She had been singularly won by this old house of Kilcarrick, and Mrs. Fitzgerald's kindness had sunk deep into Anna's heart. And the children, too—they were gay, natural, affectionate children, who were not afraid to speak above a whisper when asked a question. Anna felt that she could be very happy at Kilcarrick, and she yearned passionately after

the peace of soul which life here seemed to promise.

But this was not to be.

How happy she had felt last evening, during that drive from Ballydoonan Station. She had thought then that she and Bonnie Dunraven should have such delightful talks together—such long, lonely walks by the sea—such confidences, perhaps. And how she longed for a friend such as this—a dear girl-friend—to whom she could speak out frankly and fearlessly, in whom she could confide so many things which weighed heavily upon her desolate heart.

But this, too, was not to be.

With a heavy sigh, Anna continued to set her trunk in order. She was not thinking much of what she was doing, and unconsciously she began to remove the articles from her trunk, one by one. Suddenly a small box fell from her hand upon the floor, and this occurrence recalled her thoughts at once. The box was a tiny writing-desk of satin wood and silver, and as Anna took it up in her hand she saw that the lock had given way and the desk was open.

A singular change passed over her face as she looked into the open desk. A frown contracted her brows, her lips closed sternly, the expression of her eyes was hard and scornful. A small leathern case lay within the desk; Anna drew it out with shrinking fingers, opened it, and disclosed a photograph framed in bog oak. She had almost forgotten this picture. Now, when her eyes fell upon it, the colour died out from her cheeks, leaving her face grim and haggard in its pallor.

For a minute she gazed, with flashing eyes and lips compressed, upon the man's features represented there; then, with a low and bitter cry—a cry of suppressed agony—she clinched her small right hand, and struck, with all the strength she had, the face which gazed out at her from the picture. The frame was dashed to the floor, and the glass shivered to pieces.

At this moment there was a knock at the room door. Anna hastily flung the broken picture into her trunk, shut down the lid, and then unlocked her door.

Bonnie Dunraven entered the room.

- "And is it possible, Miss Wylde," Bonnie-asked, looking ruefully at the trunk, "that you are leaving us so very soon?"
- "Yes, I was just packing up when you knocked," said Anna, and unconsciously there was a sad ring in her voice. "Mrs.. Osborne is waiting for me in the drawing-room."
- "I am very sorry you are going," Bonnie said in her frank, simple way.
- "You are not half so sorry as I am, Miss-Dunraven."

They were looking into each other's faces as they spoke. Both were standing; Anna, with her small slim figure, clad in black, her sad little face, her worn cheeks, and her dark grey eyes; Bonnie, so tall and graceful and happy-looking to-day, her bright, frank face-

so full of intelligence, her eyes, alone, somewhat clouded and saddened now.

For a minute they thus gazed at each other in silence, and then an irresistible impulse urged Bonnie to put her arm round the small black figure and draw Anna near toher. Then she stooped and kissed her.

"You must often come to Kilcarrick, dear," Bonnie said, "and you and I shall see each other very often. Glenbride, Mrs. Osborne's place, is not so far away as you fancy. Only a few miles. That distance is considered nothing in the country—nothing. And you and I shall be always good and true friends. I like you, Anna. I may call you 'Anna,' may I not, dear? And you must call me 'Bonnie,' and—and—now this is too bad!"

For Anna Wylde had suddenly laid her head on Bonnie's shoulder, and was now crying with a suppressed passion and intensity of emotion which shook her frail figurefrom head to foot. "Now, now, now, now, now," said Bonnie in soothing tones. "I had no idea, dear, you disliked going so much. Indeed, I thought you were quite happy to go. You shall not go at all," she added suddenly. "You shall not suffer like this. And it is all my fault—upon my word. Yes! all my fault. I am a selfish wretch! There now, Anna, dear, I will go this moment and tell Mrs. Osborne not to expect you. You shall remain here!"

"It is not that—it is not that," said Anna Wylde, in a low broken voice. "It is your kindness, Miss Dunraven—and it is so long since—since I have been treated like this. May God bless and protect you, Bonnie Dunraven!" she added, raising her tearful eyes and looking for a moment full into Bonnie's face. "Yes; I trust you. You are true. You will be my friend always. I believe it now."

"You may trust me, Anna. I will be your true friend, dear. Never doubt that.

But you really must not go away with Mrs. Osborne. I shall arrange it all with her in a few words."

"No, Bonnie. I am quite happy to go, now. You have done wonders for me. I was afraid I should lose you by going to Mrs. Osborne's. Now I know better. Oh, Bonnie, I have yearned for somebody whom I could consider to be almost a sister to me, and—and I think I have found one, at last."

"And now, dear," said Bonnie, when they had talked on for some minutes longer, "I shall leave you alone to finish your preparations, and when you are quite ready, the servant shall carry down your trunk, and you and I will have a little stroll together down on the drive before Mrs. Osborne leaves. That is, if you wish."

Anna was, you may be sure, only too glad to agree to this, and so Bonnie withdrew.

Ten minutes later, the two girls left the house together, and walked down along the drive under the old trees. Anna had made her adieux to Mrs. Fitzgerald and such of the children as were to be found in the house; so the first wrench was over, and, with a dismal sinking of the heart, Anna was now leaving behind her the place where she had found peace and happiness—rare godsends, verily, in Anna Wylde's wrecked life.

It was a windy February day. A grey sky of torn cloud blurred with scudding rack. A grey sea with long lines of white foam streaking here and there the weary waste of turbid grey water. The wind moaned drearily in the bare branches of the mighty oaks and elms. The only bits of warm colouring, in this doleful picture of greys, and duns, and sickly whites, were the yellow and brown tints of the variegated ivy which grows on the western side of the old house, and the orange and lemon-hued lichens which dot the weather-worn slated roof.

Bonnie and her companion walked along briskly until they came at last to the ancient gate-way, with its moss-grown pillars and its general character of picturesque dilapidation. Here they paused and gazed across the fields and hedges to the cliff-tops, and the dun ribbed sands, and the wide, weary ocean. There was something soothing to the troubled spirit in the infinity of that stretch of turbulent grey water. There was something invigorating in the measured upheaving of the surf, and the thunder of the breakers crashing in along the lonely shingle. There was something vitalizing in the keen salt savour of the air.

Anna's spirits rose; her eyes sparkled; her face brightened.

"How dark and troubled the sea is, to-day," she said? "What is wrong, I wonder, out there where the foam is dashing over that bit of rock. How angry it seems. After all, Bonnie, are we not all so many pigmies, with our pigmy sorrows and our pigmy furies? What is the good of our beating our miserable little allowances of flesh and bone

against the iron cage of circumstance? It only draws blood, and enlarges our wounds."

"But bleeding is often recommended, you know, as a necessity of health," said Bonnie, who did not care, just now, to wander into the mazes of the abstract. "Now just look over there, Anna, at that rocky point which runs out into the sea. Aren't the waves splendid over there! That is Liskeelan Point, and that great height—or promontory above, with the old tower on the summit—that is Liskeelan Head. When the tide is out, there is a charming little strand down there at this side of the Point—a delightful bathing place. By-the-way, do you swim, Anna?"

"Swim! No. Do you?"

"Like a stone! I'm only joking, dear. Yes; I really do swim—at least, it was one of my marine accomplishments; but I'm afraid I'm sadly out of practice now. However, I shall make up for lost time when the

summer comes. Oh, dear! how I look forward to it!"

"So do I, Bonnie. I think an old world sea-place like this must be almost a Paradise in summer weather."

"A Paradise without the 'almost,' " cried Bonnie, enthusiastically. "Oh, the long blue days, and the long blue evenings, and the soft, sweet dreamy southern nights. I say 'southern,' because I always fancy I am in Italy—somewhere by the Mediterranean, or the Adriatic—on such nights as those I speak of."

"And I suppose, you fancy you hear

laughter and strum of guitars from the shore, And sonorous bass music of bells booming deep, From St. Mark's!

I hope we shall have many such nights, Bonnie. But I am beginning to be uneasy about your intense love for the sea. I feel jealous. I think when one loves natural beauty too warmly, one grows selfish toward one's merely human sisterhood or

brotherhood, as the case may be. I think poets are always—or nearly always—hard-hearted people."

"'Hard-hearted'! You Goth! You Hun! You barbarian! Eat your words on the spot!" cried Bonnie. "A poet hard-hearted! Why, I could lie down and lay my neck under a poet's feet, and say—if I dared to speak at all, which I doubt—'put your foot down on my neck and walk over it!' A poet hard-hearted! How could any human being with music in his soul be hard-hearted? And a poet must of necessity be musical. He must have an exhaustless living fund of music within him. He must have sympathy—genuine, thorough, sincere sympathy. He must be a god, and a god is not hard of heart."

"Well, Bonnie, perhaps I spoke in too narrow a way," said Anna, and now a strange hard look seemed to have come into her dark eyes. "Some day you may know why I have said what, to you, clearly seems heresy. You may, and you may not. Time will tell."

Bonnie looked into her companion's face with a sudden searching curiosity.

- "Why not tell me now, instead of that vague 'some day?'" she asked. "You need not be afraid to speak out, Anna."
- "No—no—no—don't dwell on the subject," said Anna, with sudden energy. "I don't intend to speak of it. Would you like to take up in your hand the body of the adder which had poisoned your blood, and sapped your life? I think not."
- "Anna Wylde, I don't half understand you," said Bonnie, looking into Anna's face. "You are a contradiction. A few minutes ago you spoke of the pigmy woes of life. That was very philosophical, and very true, I suppose. But why do you disclaim your tenets?"
- "You cannot judge me yet, Bonnie. Hold over your verdict for a while longer. Give me at least an impartial hearing, and then decide. Hush! here comes Mrs. Osborne's carriage. Oh, Bonnie, must we part so soon?"

"I wish Mrs. Osborne and her carriage, and her precious Lucy and Minnie were in Timbuctoo!" whispered Bonnie; and now the vehicle had stopped, and Mrs. Osborne's soft tones were heard.

"I'm so sorry to have interrupted your tête-à-tête," she said, graciously. "I wish you would come and spend the day with us at Glenbride, Bonnie. Do. I am very anxious to hear some of your Scotch songs; my old favourites."

But Bonnie excused herself for that day, and Anna Wylde took her place beside the demure Lucy in the comfortable old carriage.

"I wonder you venture out, Bonnie, without warmer covering," said Mrs. Osborne. "I find the wind most cutting. Lucy, dear, wrap yourself up well. Little Frank has a heavy cold, and I'm sure I don't know how he got it. But the draughts in Glenbride are terrible at times. I hope you are not very much afraid of draughts, Miss Wylde?—"And so on.

"I shall not delay you here," said Bonnie, at last, anxious, indeed, to cut short this not singularly entertaining conversation. "Goodbye, Mrs. Osborne. Goodbye Lucy and Minnie. I shall soon—very soon—see you, Anna, dear. Farewell."

Then they were gone, and Bonnie stood out on the lonely road, kissing her hands, and smiling a little sadly, as the old carriage bowled smoothly along, and disappeared at last around the turn of the road.

And now a strange, sudden feeling of loneliness and depression came over Bonnie. Was Anna really gone, and was it possible that she could already miss her so very much? Five minutes ago she had felt, indeed, sorry to part from her recently-made friend; but there was nothing of bitterness mingled with her thoughts. Now this was changed, and the bitterness was veritably there.

It is always so, of course. While the friendly face is before our eyes, while the sweet tones are in our ears, while the chord

of sympathy is actually vibrating from soul to soul, we are wont to accept such boons not very gracefully, and perhaps rather carelessly, on the whole; not appreciating the worth of our treasure—we don't think it a treasure at all, most likely!—not caring very much, perhaps, whether the friendly face, and the sweet tones, and that subtile chord are withdrawn, or whether they remain.

But when they are absolutely gone, then what a change! What wild regrets, then, and remorse of conscience, and what sudden clear insight and discernment, where, awhile ago, there were indifference and neglect.

We look before and after; And pine for what is not.

And "the tender grace of a day that is dead" haunts us all through the long after years, when "the day" and "the grace" are alike dead and gone for evermore.

Bonnie, looking along the now deserted road, while the rumble of the carriage was lost, by degrees, in the thunder of the

sea, knew, for the first time, what a true friend had gone away from Kilcarrick—what a dear sister—what a genial, sympathetic companion.

Well, she was gone; and it was not Bonnie's way to remain inactively lamenting over the inevitable. So, with a sigh, and one more glance along the lonely road, Bonnie was about to turn on her heel, and retrace her steps to the house, when a voice, well-remembered, though she had heard it last five long years ago, rang in her ears, and the next moment a man's strong hand was laid upon her arm.





CHAPTER V.

ONLY A SISTER, AFTER ALL!

HE owner of the hand was now gazing with full blue eyes into Bonnie's startled face, and for a minute or two there was no word spoken.

"Is this Bonnie Dunraven, or is it a tall Englishwoman, or what?" said the owner of the hand, at last, in his very pleasant voice. "Is this my old friend and playmate come back to us again?"

"Oh, Bob—Bob! how are you?" cried Bonnie then, with a delight in her face and voice as honestly genuine as it was welcome to her hearer. "I can hardly believe it is you. I cannot tell you, Bob, how glad I am

to see you. Why, what a fine big fellow you've grown! Oh, dear! I suppose you are 'Doctor Grace' now, though!" added the girl, whose hand was undergoing the torture of Doctor Grace's cordial pressure. "It is five years, I declare, since—wait! Let me see. No. Four years and eight months since I saw you. And now I suppose you're a clever, sensible man?"

"If, by 'sensible,' you mean settled-down, or sober-sided, or anything of that kind," laughed he, "you wrong me. I am the very same, simply, as I always was; except, indeed, as you say, I am now entitled to the prefix 'Doctor,' and, Bonnie, I know you will be glad to hear that I am getting on well in this neighbourhood."

"I am glad, Bob. Very glad. You have the Dispensary here? You are stepping in for Uncle Hugh's patients, I suppose?"

"I am freeing the old gentleman's hands and conscience from troublesome burdens. Some of the more Conservative valetudinarians, however, can't persuade themselves (or be persuaded) that a medical practitioner who hasn't grey hairs and a wife, could possibly be capable of doing anything right. So I am afraid those venerable dowagers will cling on to the poor old man unto the bitter end."

"Old Mrs. M'Bride, of Rathnahinch, for example? And how long have you been practising, Bob, or Doctor Grace, or whatever I am to call you?"

"If you call me 'Doctor Grace,' I must, of course, call you 'Miss Dunraven'; and, somehow, the words will stick in my throat and most surely choke me some day. So out of consideration for my valuable life, do, for mercy's sake, adhere to the old style. Why should I be 'Doctor Grace' I ask?"

"Well, because you are 'Doctor Grace,' you know."

"Not to my old friends, Bonnie. When you and I played 'Hunt-the-Fox' in and out among the orchards, in the old days, I'm sure

we never thought for a moment that, in a few years later, we should hold a discussion as to the fit and proper adjustment of our several titles! But O, Mrs. Grundy! What a withered old rattle-snake art thou!"

"A withered old rattle-snake, surely," said Bonnie, laughing. "I fully agree with you. And so, in order not to fall too low in your estimation, I will call you 'Bob,' just as I used. So now, Bob, answer me that last question I put to you. What was it, by-the-by? Oh, yes. I want to know how long you've been practising, and all about yourself. In fact, you must tell me your entire history for the last five years."

"Good! Hadn't I better write it out for you, verbatim et literatim, and send you the manuscript?"

"No; writing is only language frozen, as I saw stated somewhere lately. You used to tell a thing very graphically long ago. I hope you haven't lost your talent."

"Well, but I have very little to tell. I

say, Bonnie, what is the good of our standing here, though? Come along, will you, for a stroll toward Liskeelan? It is so much pleasanter, as well as easier, to talk when one is walking."

"To Liskeelan? The dear old spot. To be sure I will, Bob!" Bonnie said; and accordingly they set out, side-by-side, at a brisk pace along the lonely old road in the direction of Liskeelan Head.

Grace was a fine, tall, powerfully-built fellow, stalwart and brawny as a young athlete. He was broad-shouldered, deep-chested, thin of flank, long of limb; and, together with these points, his hands and feet were small, so that the man's muscular strength was beyond question. His head was small, and well-set on his powerful shoulders. He had bright golden hair, which curled up close and crisp, and his eyes were blue and smiling, and singularly pleasant to meet full. For the rest, he was rather comely than handsome; but, indeed, the

kindness and thorough manliness of his face left little in the way of mere beauty of feature to be desired.

When he laughed his laugh was genuine and light-hearted, and had a pleasant ring like music. He was always courteous to women, and kind—I may say tender, indeed—toward children. When you looked full into his honest blue eyes—pure blue, mind you, not grey-blue, not steel-blue—you felt the charm of them stealing over you, and you read the man's character there and then.

Grace was of opinion that he was positively a plain-looking fellow, and this belief did away with any small feelings of self-conceit, or anything of that kind, to which, perhaps, even the best-intentioned and most conscientious of men are more or less prone.

He was a distant relative of Doctor Fitzgerald's, and had, as a lad, been much at Kilcarrick. He had, subsequently, spent his vacations there for the most part, and it had thus come to pass that he and little Bonnie Dunraven had been thrown together a good deal in their earlier days. During Bonnie's later visits to the old house young Grace had not been there to meet her. He was engaged in Dublin, "grinding" for his examinations, attending lectures, and one thing or another. And so it had happened that almost five years had passed away since these two old friends had seen each other last.

- "I called at the house," said Grace, as they walked briskly along, "and they told me you had gone out with—a—with Miss Savage."
- "Miss Savage! Who is Miss Savage?" interrupted Bonnie, laughing.
- "Well, whatever her name is. What is the right word? Isn't it Savage?"
 - "I suppose you mean Miss Wylde."
- "Oh, by Jove! Yes, to be sure. Miss Wylde, to be sure. Well, when I heard you were gone down with Miss Wylde, I started in pursuit. And, do you know, I saw you for fully five minutes before I could screw up my moral courage to accost your ladyship."

"Why so?" said Bonnie, looking full at him.

"For all sorts of reasons. In the first place I said to myself, 'Now, maybe, she is changed. Maybe she will address me with chilling politeness, give me the tips of her pretty fingers, and the faintest of smiles by way of salutation!' And then I had other reasons, too—reasons which are too impalpable to catch up and embody in words. Five years is a long time, you know, Bonnie, and brings—may bring, at least—many changes."

"It may bring many physical changes, of course," said Bonnie; "but I don't see, Bob, why the changes should go any deeper. Doubtless you think me very much changed; do you?—for the worse, too, I fear?"

She looked up at him as she spoke, but there was not even the faintest trace of coquetry in the action. It was simply a question which she wished him to answer, precisely as she might say to him, "I cut my forehead when I fell the other day on the ice. Does it appear to be healing?"

- "You are changed, Bonnie. Why not, after so many years? But do you know how you are mostly changed?"
- "I suppose I am more faultlessly lovely than ever."
- "You are joking now. But you shall hear what I have to say. Bonnie, you are no longer my sister as you used to be. I am not your brother any more. And there lies the change."
- "Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Bonnie, more energetically than she had spoken yet. "I did not imagine you would go in for that kind of thing, Bob. You have been reading some silly, fifth-rate novels of late I suspect. Come, confess! What were they?"
- "I was never much of a novel reader,. Bonnie, as you know well; and it so happens that I haven't even looked at the back of a book for the last two months or so. But surely we don't go to a 'silly fifth-rate novel'

(to use your own contemptuous phrase) for truths that are the reverse of silly, do we?"

- "What's this? Your great truth is, I am not your sister any longer! And why not, Doctor Grace?"
 - "Confound the 'Doctor Grace."
- "With all my heart, if he is my brother. But, if not, surely I must pull up a little, and be more decorous as to the epithets I apply to him."
 - "Bonnie, a-"
- "Miss Dunraven is my name, Doctor Grace!"
- "A sister is very well, to be sure; but—she is not all. A time comes when we find that a sister merely is not enough, and wish for somebody else's sister, don't you see? And that is what I meant by saying you are changed."
- "And I repeat, Doctor Grace, that you have been reading some silly fifth—sixth-rate novel. Let us drop the subject. We are nearly at Liskeelan now. Poor old Liskeelan!

The notion of your striving to devastate all our old associations by your ultra-refined distinctions! Of course, if you wish to go in for that kind of nonsense, everything is changed—everything. We cannot walk together. We cannot talk together with any verve or naturalness. We shall be metamorphosed into two sticks with fluffy heads—psha!"

- "Or sweeping-brushes, Bonnie, or brooms?"
- "Yes—or mops. Something, anyhow, that is stiff and woodeny, and utterly ridiculous and silly. Come, come, am I to call you 'Bob' or not?"
- "If you call me anything else, Bonnie, I shall never speak a word to you again!"
- "Good! Well then, Bob, let us say no more about the matter. Here we are at Liskeelan. How I love this spot!"

They had now strolled off the road-side through a tumble-down gate-way, and were mounting the sweeping upland towards the grey old tower which stands on the summit of Liskeelan Head. The slope is sheer, and the grass at this side grows long, and lush and thick. They toiled up the hill which was so steep that it hid the sea completely. By the time they had gained the summit Bonnie's cheeks were glowing with colour, her eyes were sparkling.

They were now standing at a great height hill curved down above the sea. The gradually from where they stood, and far below were the grey cliffs, and the shingle, where the huge green waves came in, heaving, and crashing, and foaming, and filling all the air with a hollow, thunderous boom. Far away over the ocean the clouds hung low and dark; long lines of white foam streaked the troubled grey-green water; the heave of the surf was stormy and irregular: the wind whistled through the crannies of the rocks, and around the old tower, and blew full, and strong, and vitalizing, into the faces of Bonnie and Doctor Bob.

A pair of wretched-looking, lean, and' abnormally hairy donkeys were grazing on the slope of the hill, and this disreputable-looking couple were the only signs of life in the place, save, indeed, for the sea-gulls and the sand-martens which wheeled and screamed far down over the rocks, and the shingle, and the sea.

Bonnie was very silent now. Somehow, she could not speak. There was a strangely earnest look in her eyes, her lips were slightly parted.

It may be a sound—

A tone of music—summer's eve—or spring—
A flower—the wind—the ocean—which shall wound,
Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound.

That electric chain had now been struck, and the early days of her childhood were more clearly before Bonnie's eyes and mind' than the cliffs, and the shingle, and the sea.

Poor old Liskeelan. As a child Bonnie had been peculiarly given to investing inanimate objects—trees, rocks, and so forth—with human personalities. Old Liskeelan

had thus taken, in little Bonnie's eyes, the character of a kind, rugged, great-hearted old friend and confidant. How often had the little girl come here, long ago, and sat down on the thymy herbage, with the weary ocean stretching out before her, and the rolling green hill behind her, shutting out the noisy world, and leaving the little girl all alone here with the wheeling gulls, and the dun ribbed sands, and the grey rocks, and the sea.

Bonnie had been wont to pour out all her childish secrets—and what big secrets she had then considered them, to be sure—to the old tower, and the rocks, and the great green waves. That old grey tower was a very patient listener. It never rebuked little Bonnie, nor intruded its own wrongs upon her—and, goodness knows, the child thought, it had wrongs and sorrows enough, poor wind-beaten old tower! And the waves—they never scolded her either. Not they. They listened to all she had to say, and they

moaned, and hurtled, and complained among themselves, to be sure, but, somehow, their voices had a soothing effect upon the child. She used to listen for hours to the stern dirge which the waves chanted without ceasing all day long. Her ear became attuned to the voice of the sea, and her heart caught up the wild monotone, and made use of it in its own way; for Bonnie's character became strangely softened, and soothed, and saddened, about this time, as though it were gradually chiming in with the weary plaint of the sea.

But all that was long ago—long, long ago. To Bonnie it seemed almost a hundred years since she had poured out her heart to the old tower. And now she was here again—here on the very green slope where she had so often lain. She almost expected to come across the ghost of her dead childhood here, so inextricably was the spot interwoven with the innermost fibres of her being.

By-and-by, her tongue was at last

loosened, but now the careless gaiety seemed to have gone away, for the time being, from her conversation. She spoke quietly and earnestly, and this genuine earnestness had, somehow, a stronger fascination for Robert Grace than even the light-hearted carelessness of awhile ago. But, oh, why should her earnestness be so directed?

She asked Doctor Bob all about himself and his prospects, and his adventures during those five long years. Had she been veritably his sister, she could not have spoken more frankly, with a more genuine concern for his welfare, with less of that significant reserve and shyness which poor Grace would gladly welcome, instead of Bonnie's dispassionate openness.

Why did she so naturally, and as a matter-of-course, adopt this easy sisterly tone and manner? Why did she so calmly ignore every one of his wistful glances and insinuations? Was it unconsciousness merely, on her part, or the subtly devised self-defence

of clear insight? If the latter, why should she stand on the defensive? If the former, why should she be unconscious of how matters stood?

These random thoughts were passing and repassing rapidly, and with many twists and variations, in Grace's troubled mind during his walk back with Bonnie Dunraven, and when at last they had parted at the old gate of Kilcarrick, and Grace was pursuing his homeward way alone, one thought was chiming over and over again in his brain, one miserably unanswered question—

"Has she come back to me only a sister, after all?"





CHAPTER VI.

THE OMEN OF THE CUP.

school-room, ordering the necessary books, slates, atlases, and so forth—for, indeed, there was a melancholy dearth of such things, which spoke volumes for Miss Quinlan's tactics—and selecting the hours for class and study. She was very matter-of-fact and energetic during these preliminary processes. Any fond expectations of cousinly indulgence, which may have glimmered in upon the children's minds, were speedily allayed. Clearly, Cousin Bonnie knew what she was about, and "was up for no humbugging," as Master Freddy phrased it.

Poor Miss Quinlan—the children's former governess—was old and asthmatic, and somewhat given to taking a nap, now and then, during class-hours; during which little digressions the children amused themselves by producing slate-pencil portraits of the sleeping lady, and by sundry other diversions of an agreeable, but scarcely orthodox character.

Norah, indeed, never joined in any of these playful pastimes. But Norah was not very much in the schoolroom. Her extreme delicacy of health had kept her more or less isolated from her little sisters and brother. Miss Quinlan was wont to give Norah a private hour or so of an evening, after the regular class-hours, and Bonnie would now, of course, be only too happy to do the same.

Well, there is a small, cosy, low-ceiled old room in Kilcarrick, called the Orchard Room. It looks westward, and you gaze from its one ivy-wreathed window straight into the heart of the old orchards. When the trees are leafless you get glimpses between their trunks and branches of the rolling country inland, the fields and uplands, the dark wooded ridges, and the far blue hills. But in spring-time and summer the dense tree-foliage and blossoms shut out the inland view, and your eyes are wonderfully soothed by the cool greens, and browns, and goldenreds of the leaves and boughs, and mosses, and the carmine and flake-white of the apple blossoms.

It is a dear old room—I know it well—and many a long May evening little Bonnie spent long ago, gathered up cosily on the broad window-seat, and gazing out listlessly through the open window, with the breath of the apple blossoms, and the purple lilac which grows alongside of the wall, wafted in upon the light breeze, and the level rays of the setting sun glancing in redly through the leaves. The Orchard Room was one of Bonnie's pet rooms in Kilcarrick; and it was

the Orchard Room which she now selected for the childrens' class and studies.

During Miss Quinlan's reign, this room had been occupied solely by a huge old clothes-press, and Bonnie found it a by no means easy process to soothe the ruffled spirit of Kitty Maguire, when it was suggested to her that this venerable press should be removed elsewhere.

Kitty Maguire was an ancient retainer of the Kilcarrick household, had nursed poor Alice Fitzgerald, and had terrified little Bonnie well nigh out of her wits many a time, by certain weird and gruesome stories which Kitty, in turn, had learned from her mother, old Creena Maguire, long, long ago. Kitty was now about seventy years of age, but she was still able to recall the greater number of her stories, and to jig "The Wind that Shakes the Barley," and "The Monster Butter-milk," and "Come Haste to the Wedding," with a vigour and accuracy surprising to hear. She spoke Irish fluently,

and the old Doctor would oftentimes spend a half-hour talking with Kitty in the Irish tongue; for he, too, understood the motherlanguage, but not nearly so thoroughly as did Kitty Maguire.

This old woman was tall and slight, with dark penetrative grey eyes, black shaggy brows, and perfectly white hair. Her face was long, and lean, and yellow, and not unpleasant, even still, when she smiled. But, in repose, the face was dismal and stern, and the long thin nose and projecting peaked chin, gave a witch-like character to the whole countenance, a character heightened by the yellow and blackened fangs which showed. at times, between the old woman's shrivelled lips. One marked peculiarity in the face was a certain scared look which now and then flashed across it. When you entered the kitchen noiselessly, or suddenly, this expression in the old woman's face shocked you at first, and then piqued your curiosity. Was it merely a facial accident, or an acquired habit? There was a story current in the Kilcarrick household about Kitty's having been born on Halloween, and being, therefore, endowed with the faculty of seeing ghosts and other spirits. In this way was explained the odd shrinking expression of the old woman's face. Be this as it may, Kitty had, on many occasions, mumbled out wild and startling things during her sleep; and in these incoherent ramblings more than one ghostly visitant had prominently figured.

When questioned directly as to her supernatural endowments, the old woman was not given to be communicative. It was only by a system of subtle "pumping" that you gained your point in the end; but when once you had succeeded in blinding the old woman as to your real intentions, the process of coming at last at her supernatural lore was comparatively an easy one.

And then when Kitty did actually begin to talk on the subject, you were amply rewarded for you patient perseverance. During these sinister revelations Kitty's voice was wont to drop to a mysterious key, sinking away to a whisper when the narrative grew unusually eerie.

Bonnie was especially successful in winning the old woman's confidence. Perhaps the reason was, that Kitty had always loved the little girl who indeed reminded her of "poor Miss Grace," the Doctor's dead sister, and Bonnie's mother. Kitty was wont to show her affection for little Bonnie, long ago, by the manufacture of sundry homely sweetmeats—to wit, treacle-tarts, toffy, brownsugar stick, and such dainties—for the child's special delectation. And now her little pet had grown up into a tall, fair, bright-looking girl, a girl with sunshine in her face, and music in her happy voice, and the warmth of an Irish heart in the cordial pressure of her hand.

How could Kitty deny her anything? It was, to be sure, an exceedingly important matter to remove the big Kilcarrick clothes-

press from its lawful and long-recognized situation; but if it was to be done, why some other spot must only be found for its future accomodation. So Kitty yielded, having carefully impressed "Miss Bonnie" with a due sense of the weighty import of the proceeding.

Some hours later, on that same evening, Bonnie, entering the Orchard Room, to see about the removal of the big press, found a pleasant fire burning in the grate, and a brown tea-pot on the hob, and Kitty Maguire herself seated cosily on the hearth, puffing away contentedly at a short, blackened clay pipe, or dhudeen.

"Upon my word, you are enjoying yourself, Kitty!" exclaimed Bonnie, advancing to the fireside. "What a cosy old room this is, to be sure!" she added, kneeling down on the hearth in her accustomed attitude.

"I'm takin' a shough, Miss Bonnie. Maybethe smoke 'll sicken ye, alanna?"

"Not at all. Don't you remember how.

often I sat with you in the kitchen long ago, Kitty, and you 'shoughing' away to your heart's content."

"God be wid th' ould times!" Kitty ejaculated, shaking her head. "It's often I thinks of 'em. Musha, do ye remimber the time, Miss Bonnie, whin I used to give ye the fine dips below on Liskeelan Sthrand? Ye worn't wan bit afeared o' the wather. Not you! I never seen the likes. It's often ye'd roar meal o' murther for me to let go o' you, intirely! An' sure maybe it's out in the salty ocean ye'd be swep' afore I could hould you, God bless the mark!"

"Well, you know, I was only a very little child at that time," said Bonnie, as though apologizing for her juvenile misdemeanours; "there's no fear of me, now, Kitty; I can swim. Well, well, what fun we had long ago! Are you glad to have me back again at Kilcarrick, Kitty?" she said, laying her hand on the old woman's knee, and raising her bright eyes to Kitty's lean yellow face.

"Glad to have ye back, acushla! It's I that is, Miss Bonnie, an' no wondher I would! Why, you're the light o' my eyes, my darlin', and so was your mother—God rest her soul! before you. Glad to have you back!" and Kitty Maguire took up Bonnie's hand, and pressed it to her shrivelled lips. "May God bless you, mavourneen, and give ye health, an' stringth, an' happiness every day o' your life! Sure it's often an' often I thought o' you, and I was kilt intirely to see ye again, Miss Bonnie. An' now—thanks be to God! ye're here wance again, and ye won't be lavin' us any more."

"And don't you ever intend, Kitty, to allow me to get married?" said Bonnie, laughing; but her eyes were saddened now. The old woman's warm-hearted words, and the allusion to her dead mother, had sunk deep into Bonnie's heart.

"Av coorse ye'll be married, an' a fine fella ye'll get, too, plaze God! Why not, to be sure? An', be the same token, acushla, did ye happen to meet young Docthor Robert Grace since ye come home?"

"I did, Kitty. I had a long walk with him yesterday. We went to Liskeelan Head, and around by the cliff-path to the little strand. He has grown a fine man. I was very glad to meet him. You know, he and I are old—old—old friends."

"Ay; an' yiz 'll be betther friends still, alanna, afore long, plaze God. Well, now, Miss Bonnie, isn't he a lawky young gintleman, intirely? Sure, whinever, he comes here, he never forgets me. 'Good morro to ye, Kitty!' he'll say, an' his roundy blue eyes full up o' good humour. God bless him! An' he's light about you, Miss Bonnie, an' ye couldn't get a betther nor a grander fella if you sarched high an' low, hills an' hollows, all the world over."

"I wish he could hear all that!" said Bonnie, laughing. "Why hishead would be turned on his shoulders, I declare. I really like him very much—very much. You

know, he was always like a brother to me, Kitty."

"An' he'll be nearer still nor a brother, plaze God, miss!"

"What in the world do you mean by that, Kitty? Do you mean that he is going to marry me!"

And the thought was so amusing a one to Bonnie that she burst out laughing, and laughed, and laughed, in a clear, ringing, joyous peal of merriment.

"O, dear me! such a thing for me to say!" she gasped then, still laughing. "You disreputable old match-maker, you! Poor Doctor Bob!" and she went off in another fit of laughing, fresh, and genuine, and pleasant to hear.

"Troth now, Miss Bonnie, it's no laughin' matter at all," said Kitty, who strongly resented Bonnie's hilarity; "maybe, now, you're thinkin' o' some English fella or other. The young Docthor is worth his weight in yallow goold. Mark now what I'm tellin' ye, miss."

- "Well, Kitty, we shan't lose temper over it. I like the 'young Doctor' very much indeed, and I think he likes me, and I hope we shall be always very good friends. As for the 'English fellow,' there's no such a person at all; so you may make your mind easy on that point, Kitty. And now I'm sure your tea is well drawn. Come, pour out your cup. Don't let me be in your way."
- "Maybe, ye'd have wan wid me, alanna?" insinuated Kitty, whose ruffled feelings were now almost entirely soothed again.
- "I don't think I—wait! Let me see. Yes.
 You may give me a cup, or half a cup. But
 I see you haven't a cup for me," said
 Bonnie.
- "I won't be long gettin' one," rejoined Kitty, preparing to rise from her stool on the hearth.
- "As if I should allow you to hobble downstairs for a cup!" exclaimed Bonnie, setting off herself on the errand.

She returned in a minute or two, and now the delightful aroma of good old tea filled the cosy fire-lit room, and the "wild winds of March" were crooning at the window, and amidst the orchards, and Bonnie felt singularly happy as she sipped her tea in the firelight.

"Oh, by-the-by, Kitty," she said, suddenly, "you must read me my fortune in this cup. You were always skilled in cup-tossing. Now it's no use for you to say 'no.' I have a good memory, and I know well what you can do."

The old woman's face darkened, the eyes fell, the odd scared look came across the features.

- "It's many a year," she said, in a whisper, "since I done the like. Ye won't ax me, Miss Bonnie, if ye plaze."
- "Oh, come now, Kitty!" Bonnie urged; "please do it—to please me. Surely there is no harm in it when it is only a joke. Come, now, Kitty; take the cup."
- "I forgets how," replied Kitty, shrinking back from Bonnie's proffered cup, and scowl-

ing a little, with a pallid stare at the embers in the grate.

"Now I shall take no excuse," said Bonnie, whose curiosity was piqued, and who was gazing, with somewhat shocked attention upon Kitty's darkened face. "Take the cup, Kitty, and toss it; if not, I shall be angry with you, and it will be long again before I drink a cup of tea with you. Mind now!"

"I hates to take it!" said the old woman, advancing a shrinking and withered hand towards the tea-cup. "Dunno mind it, miss. Leave it so in God's name, I'm tellin' ye!"

But Bonnie was energetically in earnest now, and so Kitty at last shrinkingly complied.

She shook the cup three times in the air, describing a wide circle from right to left, then brought it down, bottom upwards, upon the saucer. Bonnie leaned eagerly forward as the old woman now raised the cup, and peered sternly and darkly into its bowl.

- "What do you see?" asked Bonnie, endeavouring unsuccessfully to obtain a glance at the mysterious interior.
- "I tould ye not to press me!" cried Kitty, at last, in a voice of gathering agitation; "I begged o' you to lave over, an' ye wouldn't do it, and now it's too late! Ochone—och—ochone! I'm sore at the heart for doin' the likes o' this, this night!"
- "Kitty! Kitty!" said Bonnie, now really roused up, and seizing the old woman's arm, "it is all a harmless joke—no more! What on earth do you mean by saying such things? Here, show me the cup. What terrible adventures am I to meet with?"

She stretched out her hand for the cup as she spoke, but scarcely had she touched it when the old woman shrank back with a shrill scream, and dashed the cup, with all the strength of terror and dismay, upon the hearth-stone. The fragile old china was shivered to pieces at Bonnie's feet.

"Sooner nor show you what I saw,"

gasped Kitty, in a hoarse whisper, "I'd cut off my right hand! O, acushla, acushla! May God guard you, an' stringthen you! Be brave, be sthrong, have your wits about you, mavourneen; for if ye don't, mark my words for it, ye'll sorely rue the night ye ever come back to this house."





CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

ONNIE stooped over the fragments of the cup, and gathered them together with something of reverence in her touch. But her face had grown pale, and, in spite of herself, the old woman's wild words and evident agitation, had singularly impressed her.

"Poor old cup! I am sorry for you," Bonnie said, looking down ruefully enough upon the gaily-coloured fragments. "I knew you long ago, when I was but a little girl, and I remember dusting you, and washing you, and putting you up cosily in the old cupboard. And now your days are ended

before my very face, old cup, and I am very, very sorry for you!"

Kitty said not a word. Her recent excitement was calmed, and she was gazing sternly straight into the heart of the embers. Her long dismal face had a chalky pallor in it, her lips were compressed, her eyes, under her shaggy grizzled brows, glittered like steel.

The wind without had deepened in tone, and was heightening to storm. Long melancholy blasts swept across the house, and shuddered in the chimney-stacks, and shook the leaves of the old lilac-tree which grows right against the wall beside the window of the Orchard Room. One crazy bough, indeed, stretches across like an arm, right under the window-sill; and Bonnie, long ago, was wont to make of this bough a natural stepladder, by means of which she oftentimes got down into the orchard, thus saving the trouble of going through the house.

With the fragments of the tea-cup in her lap, and her chin resting on the palm of her right hand, Bonnie now listened to the gathering blast, and keenly enjoyed that melancholy mean and sough.

Presently Kitty Maguire rose, and mumbling something about being "wanted below stairs," shuffled away from the room; and now Bonnie was alone by the fire, alone with the broken cup and the hollow pealing of the storm.

What a grand sound it was, to be sure, with all its melancholy solemnity! What an awful dirge! Now it wailed far away in the distance. Now it rose to a long-drawn pitiful caoine, like the lamentation of the banshee which Bonnie had once heard. Then it heightened to a shriek—wild, anguished, thrilling; and then boomed hollow and thunderous in the chimneys and died away with a lengthened shudder at the far side of the old house.

Bonnie had always loved this wild, unearthly sound. As a child, she had been strangely fascinated by weird stories of "Jinny Winter," a certain witch who shrieked, and tore her long white hair, far up in the tree-tops during the stormy nights of winter. Bonnie implicitly believed that "Jinny Winter" was a real personage. She used to listen, with an awful earnestness, to the moans and sobs and shrieks of the wild woman of the trees. What a life poor "Jinny Winter" led, thought the child. How cold it must be out there in the stormy winter night—and O, how lonesome, how drearily lonesome, with no companions save the black tossing trees!

She began to feel deeply aggrieved for poor Jinny's melancholy lot; and when she came to the years of discretion, and discovered that there was, after all, no such person as this wild woman of the trees, she still, in a vague, unconscious way, attributed to the howl and peal of the storm, a kind of eldritch personality.

The fire was now burning cheerily, leaping up at times in playful gaseous jets, and cast-

ing the oddest shadows of Bonnie's head and projecting elbow upon the ceiling and the opposite wall. The voice of the storm had, by this time, grown into a solemn accompaniment to the girl's thoughts. She had satisfied herself in the way of admiring that thunderous boom as a sound merely, and she had now, almost unconsciously, fallen into one of those long deep reveries wherein the past appears to be far more real and tangible than the actual present, which has, it would seem, taken a nap for the time being.

The old days at Kilcarrick, the excursions with Bob Grace to Liskeelan, and the romps in the orchards; then her mother's death, and her own life in Surrey: all these memories were now thronging into Bonnie's mind, not consecutively, as they are written down here, but jumbled together in the oddest fashion, as if following the fitful fluctuations of the storm's voice.

So deep was her reverie, indeed, that when, after some ten minutes or so, a sound broke in suddenly on the hush of the room, Bonnie took no notice of it whatever.

A sudden sound—a tap, tap on the windowpane.

Bonnie, perhaps, heard the sound in a dreamy manner, and thought that it was likely a lilac branch blown by the wind against the glass. But it came again, and now there could be no mistake about its origin.

It was a distinct and energetic rapping of knuckles upon the pane.

Bonnie looked up sharply, and fixed her eyes on the window. The fire was now burning up brightly, and, in this red glow, Bonnie saw a human face pressed close against the glass without, and two glittering eyes peering into the room.

For a moment or two a sickening sensation of physical weakness and horror came over the girl; then she stood up briskly enough —with the briskness of terror, very likely—and hurried towards the door, in a panic, to make her escape.

But the tap—tap—tap came again, very determinedly this time, and by no means like the knocking of ghostly fingers. It had something reassuring in its energetic distinctness; so much so, indeed, that Bonnie paused in her flight, and turned and stood looking at the window, curiosity now tempering the dismay of her gaze.

The face was still pressed close to the glass, and now the shadow of a smile flitted over the features, and it seemed that the mysterious owner of the glittering eyes was bowing to the startled girl a courteous reassurance, or was it a pleasant recognition?

Anyhow, Bonnie paused no longer. She felt ashamed of her weakness, and this feeling was not long in spurring her on to the opposite extreme. Had she had her unshackled wits about her she would, I daresay, have asked for the name and business of this unknown visitor before she raised the sash. But she did nothing of the kind.

She threw up the window, and then stood

back a little, with a low cry; for she saw, fully illumined in the bright fire-light, the most striking face which she had ever laid eyes on in all her life before.

The man—for a man's face it was—had, it appeared, climbed up to the level of the window by way of the old lilac tree, and was now leaning forward on the sill, his felt hat pushed a little back from his forehead, his black eyes fixed on Bonnie's face.

For a minute each gazed at the other, and there was no word spoken. It was one of those tremendous minutes when the life of a human being receives its impetus towards its destiny. Such minutes seem to be the issue of the veriest chance. Had Bonnie, for example, instead of remaining in the Orchard Room this evening, gone away with Kitty Maguire, her whole after life would, most likely, have been far different from what it was.

"I'm awfully sorry if I have frightened you," said the stranger then, in a low, and YOL. I.

singularly pleasing voice—a voice with a foreign ring in it, Bonnie thought. "Have I frightened you very much? It is too bad really. But the fact of it is, I have lost my way, and I saw the glimmer of light from this window, and so I climbed up and peeped in, and ventured to make my presence known in the least aggressive manner I knew of. I hope you will forgive me?"

"Well, to be candid, you startled me just a little at first," said Bonnie; "but I have managed to get over it by this time."

- "And you forgive me, I hope?"
- "Oh, yes, entirely," she said, laughing.
- "Thank you very much. I hardly expected so prompt an indulgence. And now, may be, you will do me the additional kindness of explaining to me something of my present locality? I have veritably lost my way. I have walked from the station—Bally—Bally—What's the name? Bally—something—or—other, anyhow."

- "Ballydoonan, I suppose?" Bonnie suggested, with a smile.
- "Thank you again. Ballydoonan, to be sure. Well, I am on my way to L'Estrange's, of Castle Strange. Are you acquainted with L'Estrange? His wife is a kinswoman of mine."
- "My uncle knows him very well," replied Bonnie, feeling now more at home with the stranger, and drawing about half-an-inch nearer to the window. "And is it possible you have walked all the way from Bally-doonan? How tired you must be."
- "Not at all. I am a first-class walker. My knapsack is one of my dearest friends, and my blackthorn one of my pleasantest companions. I enjoyed the walk this evening immensely. That is to say, of course, so long as I had daylight, or even the gloamin'; but, you see, I was too foolhardy, and I wandered away from the road and got entangled in a maze of trees and fields and orchards, until at last this window

shone out like a guiding star. I'm sure I don't know what I should have done had I not seen it."

- "And you are really going on to Castle Strange to night?"
- "Yes, really and truly to Castle Strange. Why not?"
- "But it is nearly four miles away, and you have already walked at least eight."
- "As if I should consider twelve miles anything like a fatiguing walk! Moreover, it would never do for me to give way to laziness so very soon. I am bound for a friend's place in the neighbourhood of Lismore. Think of that!"
- "Lismore! But surely you will not be mad enough to walk so far as that in such weather? Now if it were summer, for example."
- "I hate summer. At least, I hate walking in summer. How one can enjoy that sort of thing is a puzzle to me. Just fancy a glaring blue sky, sweltering in the heat; a

broiling sun scorching up the green of the fields, and the leaves of the trees and hedges; an atmosphere like a furnace-blast, and poor dumb cattle standing in the smothering shade of some corner of a field or other, endeavouring with all their remaining energy—such as has not been altogether burnt up like dry fuel—endeavouring, I say, to shake off the thirsty flies—thirsty for their par-boiled blood. And then all the landscape, hill and dale, wood and water, simmering in a haze of heat! Honestly, do you think it a pleasing picture? I fancy not—nor do I!"

All this was delightful to Bonnie in her present mood of mind. It was, to be sure, a trifle unorthodox on her part to be thus conversing with a man of whose very name she was ignorant. But perhaps this very unorthodoxy was the reigning charm of the little episode.

And then, too, the scene was especially appropriate. The stranger's graceful head and shoulders were framed with the window-

frame; the black night behind was a Rembrandt-like background; and the ruddy fire-glow partly illumined the dark handsome face in a clare-obscure way, through which half-light the black eyes flashed brilliantly, and the white teeth shone.

Bonnie was not aware, however, of the pleasing picture which she herself made just now. Her tall graceful figure was well defined against the red glow of the fire, her bright hair was in a state of picturesque disarray, and her face was all lit up with a happiness which she entirely failed to grasp. Perhaps it was the gladness of a sudden and agreeable adventure—an unusual and unexpected little episode in her life; or, perhaps, it was something widely different therefrom.

There was, in fact, a vague suspicion haunting the girl that she had seen this man before. But when?—and where? Was it in a dream? Or, was it all only a fancy?

The stranger, looking in from his outerdarkness upon this picture of homeliness and comfort, with this lithe girl-figure in the immediate foreground, was in no hurry whatever to desert his pleasant post of observation.

It seemed, however, to suddenly dawn on Bonnie's sense of propriety, that this interview was—considering the professed purport of it—somewhat needlessly prolonged; and with, perhaps, some remorse of conscience, she forthwith gave the stranger a brief, but comprehensive, account as to the way in which he should walk so as to arrive safely at Castle Strange. Then she drew back a little from the window, and it was clear that—from some unaccountably sudden cause or other—she now desired that the little scene should come to an end.

Not so the stranger. But what could he do? A thought occurred to him.

"I shall be doubly grateful to you," he said, in his most fascinating way, "if you gave me a glass of water. It was a case of

Water, water everywhere Nor any drop to drink, as I came along by the cliffs half-an-hour ago. Pardon me for troubling you so much. What a bore I am making of myself!"

"What a cold-hearted, inhospitable creature you would make of me, though!" said Bonnie, with a compunctious warmth in her kindly voice. "I will get it for you in a minute. By-the-way," she asked him suddenly, "will you have a cup of tea? One of the old servants here has just been taking a cup, and the tea-pot is still on the hob."

"With all my heart, and very many thanks," said the stranger, laughing. "A cup of tea is the one thing above all others that I've been longing for since I left Ballydoonan—isn't that the name? Upon my honour, you are more than kind."

"I'm afraid you will find it too strong," said Bonnie, advancing from the fireside with the cup which she placed upon the broad, low window-seat.

The stranger leaned in, and now his face was fully visible in the ruddy light.

What a striking face it was, Bonnie thought. A browned thin face, all lit up with wild black eyes; a handsome nose, and a heavy dark moustache with a gleam of white teeth flashing out underneath it.

So much Bonnie took in, and she also saw that the stranger's hair was very dark brown and silky, and had a natural wave rippling through it. He had removed his hat, and the wind caught, now and then, the wavy dark locks of his hair and tossed them playfully upon his forehead.

A nearer glance showed Bonnie that the stranger's face was not alone thin, but also worn, and that there was a hollow look about the eyes, which, to her mind, indicated intellectual weariness, or worldly care, but not at all the effects of any vulgar dissipation.

From what she could see of the man's figure she conjectured that he was tall and lean; and this attenuation, too, told of much mental suffering, or, perhaps, delicacy of bodily health. There was none of the robust

brawn which so distinguished Bob Grace, for example, in this man.

And so it came to pass that Bonnie, as she looked, allowed a feeling of compassionate sympathy—still ungrasped, however, by her consciousness—to mingle with the strong interest with which the stranger had already inspired her.

The stranger, leaning in over the windowseat, sipped his tea with great relish, chatting the while in his slightly foreign, and very pleasant voice.

"Well, I shall not soon nor easily forget this little episode in my life," he said, looking into his cup. "I usually jot down in a note-book my adventures as I go along. But I will not enter this. I will keep it apart from the others—isolated. It shall not mingle with any gross element. And I shall think over it when I am far enough away."

"When you are at Lismore—at your friend's place," said Bonnie, striving to give the conversation a lighter turn.

- "I don't know whether I shall go on to Lismore or not, after all."
- "Oh, I suppose you are your own master. It is well for you!"

The stranger suddenly pushed away his cup, and drew back a little into the night.

- "My own master!" he repeated, in a voice which he had not yet used—a voice which thrilled Bonnie as she heard. And then he laughed—a short, bitter laugh, ending with a shrug of the shoulders. "Well," he added, tossing back his hair with his left hand, "this is no time for dwelling on the subject. Listen. I have something to ask you before I go. May I see you again?"
- "You will not make any stay at Castle-Strange, will you?" said Bonnie.
- "Not this time. No. But I—I may come again?"
- "If so, we shall very likely meet each other," said Bonnie, in a low voice, so low that he hardly caught the words. "But I

do not know your name," she added, with a little laugh. "My name is Bonnie Dunraven. Doctor Fitzgerald is my uncle. Your friends at Castle Strange know him very well."

"You are Bonnie Dunraven!" he exclaimed, looking up suddenly into her face. "You are the little girl who gave me the handful of 'nunnies' long ago on Liskeelan Strand!"

"I remember it!" cried the girl, in a glad, ringing voice. "I remember it all. It was one autumn evening—six, eight, ten years ago, I think it must have been. Will you believe it when I tell you that I felt I knew you from the moment I saw you tonight?"

"I shall be only too happy to believe it," he said. "Why, that evening is before my mind as clearly as this present moment. I see it all again. The long stretch of ribbed sand, the brown rocks, the wavelets lapping, lapping, washing, washing on the shingle, and a bonnie little girl with a big basket of

sea-weed and shells, and a bigger straw hat
—a grey straw it was, with a bit of blue
ribbon tied under the fair tossed hair, and a
dainty little apron with two pockets—wasn't
it? I asked the little one for a few shells—
just to hear her voice, and to see her eyes
looking up at me—and she put her pretty
hand into the basket, and drew it out
generously full of 'nunnies.' Mrs. Strange
afterwards told me that my good-natured
little friend was little Bonnie Dunraven, no
other. I never forgot the name. I cannot
tell you how glad I am of all this!"

"And so am I," said Bonnie, frankly and full-heartedly. "How well you recall it all! As for me, all my past days and evenings at Liskeelan are so many priceless pearls of memory which I treasure as I treasure my dead mother's words to me long ago."

The stranger was silent for awhile, looking down upon the window seat. Then suddenly he stretched out his lean brown hand.

"Good-bye for the present," he said, tak-

ing the trembling fingers which the girl laid in his. "We shall, I think, meet again. And now I have one word to say, and pray don't misunderstand me. Will you grant me something? It is not very much. Will you say nothing of all this—for the present? I cannot explain my reasons—yet. But—but some day you may know. Will you do what I ask?"

"It shall be as you wish then," Bonnie said, quietly withdrawing her hand from his. "I hope you will arrive safely at Castle Strange. Good-night."

"Good-night, Miss Dunraven. I cannot thank you as I would. Those who have to step down from light to darkness cannot be expected to have all at once, and at free command, the gift of appropriate, or even coherent, speech. I wonder shall I say, "Au revoir?" Be it so. Which of us can look into the Future? Au revoir then, and God bless you!"

He was gone. Bonnie stood by the window

until the last faint sound of the retreating steps was lost in the sustained roar of storm and sea. Then, as she slowly put down the window-sash, the thought suddenly came to her mind that the stranger had not told her his name.

Had he merely forgotten to do so? Or, was it a designed omission? Who was he? What story was written in his worn face—gleaming in his wild eyes—trembling in the saddened cadence of his voice?

Nameless and ghost-like, he had come to the window half-an-hour before; and now, still nameless and ghost-like, he was gone away again in the night and storm.





CHAPTER VIII.

ONE EVENING ON THE CLIFFS.

MARKED change seemed to comeover Bonnie Dunraven about thistime. She became unwontedly silent and thoughtful, and would set out of an evening, after the study hours, for a long lonely walk, not returning until tea-time, and then going quietly upstairs, instead of clearing a couple of steps at a time, as had been her formercustom.

She was listless and absent-minded, at times, when the children were conscientiously stating their views on Lindley Murray and Mangnall's Historical Questions in the school-room; and then suddenly she would break in on their fluency by asking a question

of which one of them had brilliantly treated, fully five minutes before.

It was not that Bonnie became gloomy, or saddened, or dull of spirits. Her temperament was naturally a happy one, and her laugh was as genial and genuine as ever. It was the mind—hidden behind the laughter, and the bright frank face—which appeared to be undergoing this change.

One evening, Mrs. Fitzgerald, quietly entering the Orchard Room, just after study hours, found her niece sitting on the window seat, her chin resting on her hand, her face turned toward the open window, her entire attitude expressive of dejection.

Bonnie started, and her colour deepened, when she became aware of her aunt's presence in the room. Then she laughed—a mirthless little laugh—but Mrs. Fitzgerald perceived clearly that the girl was ill at ease.

"Bonnie, my dear," said the little woman, sitting down on the window-seat and taking

one of the girl's hands in hers, "something is amiss with you, I am afraid. You are not yourself, these times, Bonnie, and—and I have been thinking over it, and surely, my dear, you are not—I hope you are not—troubling your mind about this old schoolroom, you know—and that. I wish you would give it up altogether, my dear. I do indeed. I always thought and felt that you would find it a very unpleasant drudgery. But you were so positive, Bonnie. You would undertake it—and now—"

"Upon my honour, Aunt Mary, you are altogether astray," Bonnie broke in here. "I wish you only knew how glad I am to have the charge of the children. I should feel every day as long as a week, were I not occupied as I am. I think I have a natural taste for teaching, and I certainly have a natural taste for this old room, and for my little cousins. So now, Aunt Mary, make your mind perfectly easy about me. You are too good-natured altogether. You are

always fancying that others are looking badly, or in low spirits, or one thing or another; and you are only troubling your own mind about altogether imaginary misfortunes! One thing, aunt, you may be sure of. I shall never spend an unhappy day in Kilcarrick. I love the place, and all that are in it, too dearly for anything of that kind."

Mrs. Fitzgerald was not yet convinced, however; so that Bonnie endeavoured, after this evening, to prove, by actual practice, the truth of that which she had failed to establish by mere words.

By degrees she seemed to become herself again, at least externally, and her aunt was secretly rejoiced at this. The little woman of the dark blue eyes had a big heart beating within her small body, and she dearly loved Bonnie Dunraven. Her sympathies were deep and wide. She was constantly suffering for others; and, as Bonnie had truly said, it oftentimes occurred that she first burdened one of her friends with some cross

or other, and then compassionated this purely imaginary ailment with all the warmth and genuineness of her staunch Irish heart.

Well, daily life at Kilcarrick is not the most exciting of experiences. It is, in fact, uneventful to a degree, and essentially To whose whose souls crave for rural. sensational sustenance, and whose minds are of the receptive and imitative, rather than the quietly pensive and reflective cast, life at Kilcarrick must ever be, I suppose, To be sure, wearisomely monotonous. each day has its small occurrences, its own peculiar hue and character, dear to the heart of those who love the peaceful hush and "noiseless tenour" of old-fashioned Irish country-house ways. But these small occurrences are the veriest ripples on the stream of life, and scarcely ruffle, indeed, the glassy placidity of the surface.

Bonnie's days about this time glided on very much in the same groove.

Occasionally, she drove over in the pony-

phaeton to Glenbride, to see Anna Wylde who was getting on favourably enough with Mrs. Osborne and her demure flock; or, maybe, Doctor Bob would look in of an evening, and there would be some music and songs, and a great deal of noise from Master Freddy who looked upon the young Doctor as a big brother, as, indeed, did the little girls also.

Sometimes a pedlar, passing the way, would open his pack upon the great doorstep, and this was quite an exciting event, to be spoken of for days thereafter, among the maids especially, who probably had contrived to secure sundry surprising bargains.

Bonnie, indeed, during her first six weeks at Kilcarrick, came to know pretty well one of these travelling vendors of jewellery, scented soap, old (?) lace, and such like, little dreaming, however, that this casual acquaintance was destined to influence in its own way a certain event of her life-history.

But so it really was.

He was an old north of Ireland man, bowed, and wizened, and puckered of face. His grey elfin locks clung about his forehead and the back of his neck. He had small, keen black eyes with a twinkle of fun in them whenever they glanced up under the shaggy brows. He wore a faded blue coat with long sweeping skirts, knee-breeches of black corduroy, bright blue stockings, and an odd-looking conical-crowned caubeen, with a peacock's feather (not the mere tip thereof, mind you) standing erect and elegant from the left side of the crown.

This old man's name was Connor Macneill; and Bonnie was first struck by the wonderful facility he possessed of stringing together rhymes appropriate to whatever company, or scene, in which he chanced to find himself.

For example, on his first showing himself one evening at the big front door of Kilcarrick, he laid down his pack on the broad stone step, and, having bowed low to Bonnie and Master Freddy—who were peeping slily at the old man through the half-opened door—favoured them with the following ditty, droned out to an air resembling "The Groves of Blarney":—

O, it's often I roves through Erin's groves,
An' mony a sight I there do spy,
But such a vision of beauty it is my duty
To say the like ne'er did meet my eye.

A lady fair wid angelic hair,
An' a skin like the dhriven snow;
An' a bonnie boy wid a sloe-black eye,
An' a handsome young gintleman he will grow.

An' such a house, too, sure it's like a flower show!
Wid leaves all a-buddin' on the stately trees,
An' the grandest o' door-ways for to spend one's days
Dhrinkin' the beauties o' the summer breeze.

An' it's I ha' laces and ladies' stays-es,
An' pins an' needles an' jewellery,
An' scinted soap, fit for the Pope,
An' things as come frae a foreign coontherie.

So now wi' pleasure, as I'm at my leisure, I'll show ye, miss, what 'll plaze your eye; An' if ye're consentin', ye winna be repentin' To see my wares, an' belike ye'll buy!

Having delivered which elegant impromptu, old Connor MacNeill set to work to unstrap his pack; and, ere long, the whole household had gathered on the door-step, thus inspiring the old man with a second poetical

greeting, in which each individual was separately and very flatteringly treated.

Dr. Fitzgerald himself was induced, by the sounds of singing and laughter, to join the party on the door-step; and his appearance was the signal for an additional stanza from this most prolific of pedlars—

I see before me, right in the door-way,
A gintleman of the rale auld race.
Long life to his honour, is the wish o' Connor,
An' long may he shine in this iligant place!

"Upon my word," said the old Doctor, in high good-humour, "you are one of Nature's poets, my good man! And what are all these grand things you have for sale? Dear! dear! brooches and rings, and what not! Come, Bonnie, my dear, take your choice. We must not allow this venerable poet to go away empty-pocketed!"

Nor did they; for Connor MacNeill disposed of such a quantity of his motley wares that evening as he had never before, in all his pedlar-experiences, got rid of at one and the same time. After this, he was a periodical looker-in at Kilcarrick; but he never—as he himself knew very well—wore his welcome out.

In the meantime, the tender April weather had come and was deepening into May, and the winds had veered to the south, and the blue skies stretched free and smiling overhead, and the sea caught the reflection of the blueness and flashed it back again with a deeper hue, and the old apple-trees in the Kilcarrick orchards were bursting into blossom.

Like souls that balance joy and pain,
With tears and smiles from heaven again
The maiden spring upon the plain
Came in a sun-lit fall of rain.
In crystal vapour everywhere
Blue isles of heaven laugh'd between,
And far, in forest-deeps unseen,
The topmost elm-tree gather'd green
From draughts of balmy air.

The world was all lighting up with the joyance of the spring. There was a pungent savour in the happy winds, and the dun ribbed sands had taken a silvery hue under the genial April sunshine.

With the new life of the world new blood

seemed to be instilled into Bonnie's veins. She watched the April days go by with an intense, almost painful, appreciation of the unfolding beauty of the trees and hedges, and the flowers in the big old-fashioned garden of Kilcarrick.

And then the orchards—how lovely they were with the pink buds bursting out every day into blossom, and the big lilac-tree on the wall keeping pace with the opening of the apple-buds. Away behind the orchards the inland world was also showing signs of the prime. The lush green fields were dotted over with daisies, and cowslips, and buttercups, and amid the long grasses under the hedges, there was a rare wealth of creamy primroses, and blue violets, and the delicate leaves and blossoms of the wood-sorrel.

The old trees, too, were budding out into leafy fulness. The tall elms, the stately ash, the spreading oaks and beeches were showing their young leaves,

And drooping chestnut-buds began To spread into the perfect fan, Above the teeming ground, while away in the wood-lands the graceful blue-bells and golden celandine made a bright carpeting in among the gnarled boles of the trees.

The sunshine flooded this bright awakening world with a radiant splendour. The low moan and boom of the sea filled the air all day long, and the fat yellow and brown bees murmured, in well-satisfied content, in among the apple-blooms in the orchards, and the cherry and plum blossoms which covered the garden walls.

But, to Bonnie's eyes, one of the chief charms of this late April season was the blaze of golden furze which lit up all the country side, and freighted, with a dreamy odour, the happy air. The lonely white roads were bordered with it, and when you looked along the wayside your eyes were almost pained with the whiteness of the road in vivid contrast with the rich yellow of the furze.

"It is really too bad, Cousin Bonnie, to be shut in here," said Freddy, one evening to-

wards the end of April. "I wish you'd let us bring our books and things into the open air—into the orchard, if you like."

It was the study-hour, and it happened to be an exceptionally warm evening.

"Do, Cousin Bonnie. We'll study twice as well," urged Meg and Rosa, in one voice; for Bonnie appeared to hesitate for a moment.

The hesitation was, however, a misleading sign, as it turned out; much to the chagrin of the children.

"I know very well what out-door 'studying' means," said Bonnie, shaking her head towards Master Freddy; but the young gentleman's suggestion bore fruit for all that, and in a manner by no means foreseen by Master Freddy.

It was Bonnie's custom to devote an hour or so of an evening to Norah, who never joined in the studies of the others.

Now on this genial April evening, just as Norah was preparing her French readinglesson in her little bedroom, in came Bonnie in out-door attire, which costume consisted of a big dark-blue felt hat, with drooping feathers of the same colour, a pretty, but plain, dark blue dress, and a pair of strong boots unquestionably useful if not ornamental. Both hat and dress had known much wear, but, for all that, they were decidedly becoming still.

"Norah, do you know what I'm going to propose?" said Bonnie, as she came in. "I think we may as well have our French lesson out in the open air, down on the cliffs if you wish. It is such a delightful evening.'

Norah's pale little face brightened up. Her dark eyes glowed.

"O, I am so glad, Cousin Bonnie. I was thinking just now, before you came in, how lovely it would be to have out-door lessons. You are a darling!"

"You may thank your brother Freddy for this," Bonnie explained, as they left the house together. "He was thoughtful enough to propose a change of schoolroom—from the Orchard Room, in fact, to the orchard! However, the governess did not see the propriety of the step suggested, and so you, Norah, reap the benefit of poor Freddy's ungrateful project."

"Freddy will be highly indignant, I suspect, when he finds out that you have favoured me," said Norah.

"Favour! I hate that word. There is no such word in all my vocabulary as favourin that sense!" Bonnie responded, with much "The cases—yours, I mean, and energy. Freddy—and—Co.'s—are totally different. Don't you see they are? Three children out in an orchard with their Lindley Murrays, and their slates, and pencils, and atlases, and copy-books by way of playthings! What a droll medley! But here you are, almost a young lady, indeed, just getting a finishingtouch here and there. Never talk to me of 'favour' again, Norah! O, dear, what a charming evening it is!"

"Now you are yourself again, Cousin

Bonnie. I thought you were about to annihilate me for the use of that unlucky little word 'favour.' I like you, Bonnie; I like your spirit. I was prepared for all the vials of your wrath, just now, and still I liked you for it none the less—perhaps the more, indeed."

"I am a most dangerous creature to deal with when my blood is up," Bonnie said. "Perhaps I am walking too fast for you, Norah?"

Norah was a little lame, and generally made use of a big umbrella to assist her as she walked. This evening she had forgotten the umbrella, but she was availing herself of Bonnie's arm instead.

She was paler than usual, save for the small hectic flush on each cheek, and whenever she coughed—what a dry, hard, unpleasant little cough it was too!—Bonnie winced as though she felt a throe of physical pain.

By-and-by they got out on the road, and then over a stile and along a field path leading to the cliffs. They did not turn in the direction of Liskeelan this evening. But they selected a delightful nook on the top of the cliffs where the thyme grew lush, and the trefoil was beginning to show its yellow bloom, and the trailing sprays of the dog-rose bushes were rich in bud and leaf.

They sat down side by side on the sweet smelling herbage, and there was the glorious ocean away before them, darkened here and there in the shadowed parts, and, where the light was brighter, sparkling fresh and blue as the sky overhead.

But alas and alas! for Norah's French lesson. It was destined to be quietly ignored, for this evening at all events. I really think Bonnie forgot the very existence of the unassuming little classic with its wide margined pages and its buff paper cover. She was looking out over the sea with yearning eyes. Was it gladness or pain which thrilled through her heart now?

"Norah," she was saying, speaking partly

to Norah, and partly, as it seemed, in reverie -or, was it to the sea out there?-"You and I have one common bond of sympathy, at all events. We both love the sea. We are not afraid of it. We don't consider it a tyrant." "No, no, no, indeed!" said Norah, earnestly. "If I considered it a tyrant how could I ever look upon it again with any pleasure? And it is a great pleasure to me Before you came back to us, Cousin Bonnie, I used to come sometimes and sit here for long hours, looking—looking—looking far out there over the ocean; and I could cry, Bonnie—but not with fear, mind you. I could cry with a great joy that I felt, and that carried me away as I looked. And, Bonnie, dear," here her voice dropped to a whisper, "I often came here with a sad heart. because I wished so much that I were like other little girls of my age, and could run about like them, and not be worn away by this cruel cough all day long, and all night. sometimes; and—Bonnie—when I had sat

here for awhile, looking out on the sea, I felt eased. Oh, so eased—so comforted, and I became resigned and happy. And now, thank God, I am not sad anymore. I am waiting quietly, Bonnie. It cannot be long."

Bonnie's dreamy wandering gaze was arrested in an instant. She started, and stared for a moment full into Norah's eyes.

"Waiting—waiting," she repeated, with something like horror in her face, "waiting for what Norah, darling?"

"Bonnie, I know it all. You mean to be kind, I know, but it is kindness thrown away, Bonnie. For a long time I thought I should get strong again and be as others. And I waited, and longed, and prayed, for what never came. But now, Bonnie, dear, I know the truth; and, mind you, I am not frightened at it. I am resigned to go. I cannot live long, Cousin Bonnie."

"Who in the world put such a notion into your head, my poor child?" cried Bonnie, now white as paper. "Not live long! Why should you not live as long as any of us? Norah, do not allow this thought to prey on you. Why it would be enough to kill you of itself, my darling. Not live long! I'd like to know who put that into your head. Upon my word, now, I should!"

- "Poor mother died of consumption," said Norah, quietly and sadly.
- "And then, I suppose, Freddy and Rosa and Meg are to go too—as well as you! Now, Norah, you must put this absurd delusion out of your little head. You must—won't you? To please Cousin Bonnie. Promise me that you will make up your mind to live like the rest of us, and not be digging your grave by anticipation."

And Norah, looking up, saw that Bonnie's eyes were full of tears, and that she was doing all in her power to smile through them, and that the effort was a fruitless one enough.

"There now, I have pained you, and cast a gloom over our pleasant evening," said Norah, with great compunction in her voice and eyes. "You are too kind-hearted altogether, Cousin Bonnie. I did not mean to—oh, I am so sorry for what I said. And—and—I must—I will try to do what you advise, Bonnie. I will try to get strong and brave, and remain in the open air a good deal, and not dig my grave—such a thing for you to say!—any more. Now I promise that!"

And so there was a tearful treaty made between these two, and Bonnie was smiling; but a great dread—hitherto silenced and stifled—was now quickening in her heart, stealing away the happy ring from her voice, the smile from her eyes.

She tried to reply to Norah's promise, but the words she wished to say would not come. Bonnie felt in her heart that that promise was the saddest of hollow speeches, uttered without spirit, as without hope, for the sake merely of quieting Bonnie herself. And Bonnie, looking down now into Norah's eyes, saw—or, fancied she saw—in their depths, an expression which she had never seen there before.

Reader, do you know that expression? Have you ever gazed into eyes you dearly loved, and found it there looking up at you with the tremendous significance of doom? It may have been but for a moment that you saw that expression, but I venture to say it haunted you for a long time after, and glared in on you with mute anguish when you had fancied yourself mercifully freed from it for a while. It is the most pitiful expression that I have ever seen in human eyes; for it is most surely the precursor of the awful visitant drawing nigh.

"Bonnie, Cousin Bonnie!" said Norah, shrinking a little from Bonnie's shocked gaze, "don't look at me like that. You almost frighten me. I wish—I wish I had not—Bonnie! look!" she broke off suddenly. "Who are those coming down the field? A lady and—oh, Miss Wylde, I declare, and the little Osbornes!"



CHAPTER IX.

WAS IT A PRESENTIMENT?

"Bonnie who had jumped up, and was advancing, rapidly to meet the small dark-clad figure. "How did you come? It is not possible you walked!"

"We drove in the jennet's car," put in the demure Lucy; for Bonnie had glanced at her by way of friendly recognition. "Jim Delaney is taking care of it on the road."

"We called at Kilcarrick first," said Anna, "and you had gone out with your cousin. So then I made up my mind to find you, and luckily we met an old woman on the road who had seen you both coming down by this pathway to the cliffs." "Now, children," Bonnie said to the two little girls, "I hope you and Norah will fraternize together, and Miss Wylde and I shall have a little walk along by the cliffs. Won't you come, Anna?"

"Gladly, Bonnie," was the brief, but expressive reply.

"It is a fortnight—yes, fully a fortnight since I saw you," Bonnie said, as they walked away together along the narrow pathway winding in and out as it followed the irregular course of the cliff-tops. "And are you very well, Anna? You are looking thin, I think—thinner than I like to see you."

"I am very well, Bonnie; as well as usual. I wish I could see you oftener. The sight of you does me good!"

"Well, I should very often drive over to Glenbride," said Bonnie, "but, somehow, whenever I go I don't see as much of you as I could wish. You don't seem to be altogether yourself, Anna, when Mrs. Osborne and her brood are by. And, indeed, I don't

wonder at that," she added, shaking her head; "for my part, I always feel murder-ously disposed while Mrs. Osborne is going into the painful minutiæ of her latest malady. I don't know how in the world you can endure that eternal topic!"

"I suppose custom can do a great many things. And sometimes when Mrs. Osborne is talking, I allow myself the liberty of a little mental digression," said Anna, with her quiet smile. "But, indeed, Bonnie, I am happy enough at Glenbride. There is one thing I like about Mrs. Osborne. She is a lady. To be sure, she has her hobbies; and she is not particularly broad-minded, I fancy; and she has a good deal of small jealousy-of personal attention, and that kind of thing. But, with all that, she is kindly enough in her own way-not the Kilcarrick way, though—and there is a refinement about her which I like. You will never hear her say a bitter or an uncharitable word."

"Yes, Anna, I know; but, dear me! I shouldn't like to have to spend my days with so distressingly charitable and correct a woman as that. I fancy I should feel awfully inclined, now and then, to say all sorts of profane, and sarcastic, and improper things to her, just to see how she would bear it, or whether I could possibly succeed in forcing her to retaliate. For my part, I love spirit in every man and woman. I kick against that calmly-correct, frigidly-measured, intensely 'lady-like' style of woman. Now, what do you think of me?"

- "I admire your candour, Bonnie. It is refreshing to hear you talk. Go on. What next?"
- "No. I've said my say on the subject. Moreover, I don't intend to monopolize the conversation. You shall have to contribute your share."
- "I think it would be pleasanter to be down on the sands than up here," said Anna. "Can we manage to get down?

That is, of course, if you don't object to the move."

"Not I. I love walking along by the sea. It seems quite a companion—a familiar companion, you know—when one is actually on a level with it. By-the-way, have you the feet of a chamois, and the courage of a mountaineer, Anna?"

"I have courage, Bonnie—at least physical courage—but I don't know about the other requisite."

"Because if you are not distinctively surefooted, and distinctively courageous, you will, I fancy, shrink from *this* ordeal. Look! behold our route!"

There was a gap in the grassy bank, which skirts the cliff-tops, and Anna, leaning forward and following the direction of Bonnie's finger, saw a narrow foot-way leading down the cliff-side to the sands below.

"Are you afraid to venture?" Bonnie asked. "Wait until you see me."

And before Anna had time to remonstrate,

Bonnie had begun the sheer descent, and was getting down as skilfully as a veritable chamois.

"Now I am on terra firma, you see!" Bonnie cried, lifting her bright, flushed face to the cliffs above. "Will you go and do likewise? If you think you can't manage it, Anna, don't for the world attempt it," she added, seriously.

But Anna had no intention of showing the white feather, and, by slow degrees, very warily, and not a little nervously, she did at last make the descent.

"Hurrah!" cried Bonnie, laughing. "How delightfully independent one feels when one has achieved a feat like that. Whenever I go for a long walk I invariably make it a point to strike out across country, just for the pleasure of encountering sundry obstacles in the way of hedges and ditches, and getting over them."

"But what if the obstacles be too formidable to be got over?" "Ah, there is the disappointing side! Everything has a disappointing side, Anna, my dear. It sometimes happens that I am balked, and then I wend my homeward way with a heavy heart."

They had now crossed the white parched sands near the rocks, and were walking out on the shingle alongside of the sea. How cool, how beautiful it was, out here. The dun, wet sand, edged with foam and bits of seaweed, marked the line of the incoming tide all along the shore. The sun was sloping westward, and the nearer parts of the sea were of a deep steel-blue in shadow, while, far out, a yellow radiance trembled on the water, and, farther still, the azure sealine cut level and defined against the ethereal pearl, and shell-pink, and blue-grey hues of the horizon.

A fresh wind was blowing. Now and then the sand-pipers flew along the beach crying loudly. The air was full of th briny savour of the sea, and the boom ar

"What a number of shells are all along here," said Anna; "how pretty they are, Bonnie. You don't find these 'nunnies'—isn't that what you call them?—very often, I think."

Nunnies! The word fell on Bonnie's ear with a ring of almost pain. Her thoughts flew back to the wild night last March when she had had that never-to-be-forgotten talk with the unknown at the window of the Orchard Room.

"You are Bonnie Dunraven! You are the little girl who gave me the handful of nunnies long ago on Liskeelan Strand."

Sweet, thrilling words. They had repeated themselves over and over again in her memory like some dear lines of a favourite poem. And now the whole scene was back again, recalled vividly by the one simple word falling casually from Anna's lips.

The sea before her, the girl by her side, the shingle at her feet, were not more vividly present just now to Bonnie than was the face which the firelight had illumined on that night of nights. The dark face—the lean, browned, uncommon face—with its glorious black eyes, and its flashing white teeth. And then the peculiar circumstances of the meeting gave a distinctive colouring to the affair which no ordinary grouping of ways and means could possibly give.

So sudden and so absorbing was this recollection that Bonnie quite unconsciously had paused in her walk, and was standing perfectly motionless and somewhat pale, looking down at the shells which glistened on the wet sands at her feet.

"Well, Bonnie, are you coming on?" said Anna, at last.

Bonnie started. A wave of colour surged full in her cheeks.

"Yes, yes; come along, Anna. Let us walk quickly. O, Anna, I have something to tell you. I want to tell somebody, and you, I think, will—"

Then she paused abruptly. She had all but forgotten her pledged word. Had she

not given her promise to the stranger that she would say nothing of their meeting? And was there not a strange subtile sweetness in keeping the affair secret since he himself had solicited this secrecy?

Bonnie hurriedly changed the subject, feeling, on the whole, somewhat ashamed of herself.

"Well, well," she said evasively, "it is time enough to talk of such things afterwards. Our business this evening is to enjoy ourselves, and to enjoy the sea, and to thank God in our hearts for all this beauty. Do you see that hill of sand over there to the left, Anna?—that huge whitish mass with peaks and gorges—as I may call them—just like a miniature mountain chain? Well, that is the Rabbit Burrow. Though I must say I never in all my life succeeded in finding a rabbit in it, or near it, for that matter. Shall we pay it a visit? It is years since I have been there."

"By all means let us go to it. I think it

is a wild spot. Come, Bonnie, step out briskly. That's right. I like to lean on the wind—to feel it catching me up like invisible arms, and to struggle with it, and conquer it, and hear it booming and piping its vexation in my ears. I hear it now."

"And so do I, but there is no vexation in its tone. It is a grand storm-harmony which we can't understand, but which, I'm sure, the waves know and love, too, as they toss their white crests in exultant applause. Vexation! Psha! What do the winds care for our puny little bodies, and our fluttering appendages of purple and fine linen? They make playthings of our hair, and our feathers, and whistles of our flowing skirts, and they sweep our voices away just for the fun of it, so that we may exert our lungs a little more. Can you hear what I am saying?"

"I can. At least I can follow the drift of your remarks. Bonnie, you and I are an odd pair."

[&]quot;Why so, pray?"

"We don't fulfil the regulations usually laid down for the conversation of young women."

"Don't we? We are perverse delinquents, I fear. I suppose we should be discussing the newest style of dresses, the proper shade of feathers and ribbons, whether hats are to be worn on the left side of the head or the right, or the back or the front, whether green and scarlet are 'considered'—considered, mind you—agreeable contrasts or the reverse; whether it is 'the thing' to walk fast, or to dawdle along so that our neighbours may know for certain that we do not belong to the working, and consequently vulgar, order of womankind. I wonder is that the regulation style, Anna? Or shall we go a step higher, and talk of 'enchanting verses,' and 'delicious songs,' and 'heavenly flowers,' or 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses,' like the dear delightful old Vicar of Wakefield's accomplished daughters?"

"Heaven forbid, Bonnie!"

"With all my heart. Let us then bow our heads—as gracefully as we can, under such harrowing circumstances—to the inevitable. Thank goodness it is the inevitable. Now that reminds me, some weeks ago two girls—the Talbots of Mullinderk, to wit—came over to Kilcarrick to 'renew their acquaintance,' as they said, with me. Of course I had to appear, nolens volens, and O, Anna! I never before sympathized so fully with poor St. Lawrence on his gridiron as I did during the hour-and-a-quarter of those girls' visit."

"That is strong language, Bonnie, and don't you think it might be a little less profane?"

"To be sure it might, and ought, I suppose. But what matter? It is the truth, anyhow. Such glib tongues as they possess, and when one of them—Harriet—lost or mislaid the thread of her silly vapid discourse Janetta (such a name!) supplied it generously, and so the thing went on, Harriet

dropping and Janetta picking up, and da capo! When they were gone I fell on my knees and thanked Providence I was not as they were."

"I think a certain Pharisee did something of that kind once upon a time, Bonnie?"

"Anna, you are in an aggravating mood now, so I advise you strongly to get out of it with all speed. How fiercely the wind blows! I think we shall have a stormy night—perhaps rain, too. I shouldn't be surprised. Come, hurry on. We are near the Rabbit Burrow now."

They had by this time turned away from the low-lying sands near the sea, and were making stumbling progress across the stones and sea weed, and dry heaped shingle, in the direction of the Rabbit Burrow now looming up—a mountain of sand—right ahead of them.

It is a wild-looking spot. The high summits and peaks of the Burrow rise up in jagged outline against the sky. When you enter the great hollows between the flanking heights you seem to leave the outer world far behind you, and you find yourself surrounded by white walls of dry, fine sand utterly bare of herbage of any kind save on the summits, where coarse grasses and rushes wave in the wind, and, in summer-time, the pink ground-convolvulus trails its graceful tendrils. Here and there, too, patches of trefoil are to be found, and very refreshing to the eye are the green and yellow hues of leaf and flower in direct contrast with the arid whiteness of the sand.

As the two girls entered the first of these hollows they were struck with the sudden wildness of the place. The thunder of the sea was here softened down to a low, sullen boom. The wind raved and whistled around the sharp summits of these hills of sand, and, now and then, flakes of light, white sand—miniature avalanches—were loosened from their positions and blown down into the hollow places with a low rushing sound

like the breeze through pines. Here and there upon the bottom of the hollow were clusters of pretty pink and white shells.

Bonnie and her companion climbed as best they could—and, by-the-way, it is no easy thing to make progress up the sheer ascent with the light sand shifting away at every touch—and at last their strenuous efforts were crowned with success. They reached a narrow plateau, about mid-way up the height, and here they sat down with the white summits girding them round, the sandy hollow beneath them, the sky—now darkening in the gathering twilight—looking down on them, and, in their ears, the sullen moan of the sea and the eldritch whistle of the wind.

There was something sinister in the hour and place. Bonnie felt in her heart an anxious longing to set out on her homeward way. Her spirits had fallen low since she entered this wild place. She almost feared to talk above her breath. How did she know who might or might not be lurking in amongthe nooks and crannies of this lonely Burrow?

And as the twilight gathered, and the wind whistled with a more eerisome keen, her heart still sank and sank within her as if with the awful presentiment of evil to come.





CHAPTER X.

THE EVIL THAT CAME.

"OU are very silent, Bonnie," said Anna, after a long pause. "Perhaps you don't like this place, dear? Indeed, I must say it is intensely lonesome and wild. But, do you know, it has a strange fascination for me. I like it better—shall I confess it?—than any spot I've been in since I came to this part of the country."

"And what do you see to like so very much?" Bonnie asked, with a little shiver.

"There is something tranquillizing in those great walls of sand. And listen; don't you love that low, mysterious sound of the sea?"

"I don't love it, Anna. It is an awful sound—it is like a lamentation. It is all

despair—blank despair—no hope in it. I have no spirit while it moans like that. Anna, I am sorry we came here. I feel caged in and half afraid to venture out again."

"Bonnie! You to talk so—you, who are so courageous!"

"Am I courageous? Are you sure of that?"

"But I thought you were a trifle conceited because of that self-same courage of yours."

"That self-same courage of mine, Anna, is a treacherous possession. When I am most sure of it, and most in need of it, then it is that I find it wanting."

"It is well for those who have courage, both physical and moral," said Anna, after a pause. "Bonnie," she added, suddenly turning away her head, "do you ever wonder why I am so guarded in my confidences when I am talking to you? Do you ever say to yourself, 'Who is Anna Wylde? Where did she come from? Why does she not tell me openly and frankly all about herself as I tell

her about my affairs?' Well, Bonnie, I have often longed and longed to tell you all. I am weighed down, and yet I have not the moral courage to speak."

"But why should you fear me, Anna? Would you shrink from confiding in your sister, if you had one?"

"No sister could be dearer to me than you are, Bonnie. Before God sent you in my path my life was as dreary and colourless a waste as your gloomiest fancy can picture. Do you know what it is, Bonnie, to rise in the morning with a heart fainting within you; to toil through the dreary desolate day with no hope to cheer you, and no change—not even a change of sorrow itself!—to vary the arid monotony of each lagging hour; and then at the close of the day to welcome—with, oh such a sigh of relief! the merciful sleep which, for a few hours, at all events, steals away memory and numbs pain?"

"God help you, Anna, if you had to go through the like of that!"

"Well, it is over now, and—and I am, perhaps, all the better for it, Bonnie. I have begun to philosophize on the subject," she said, with a sad, little smile, "and, do you know, Bonnie, I think suffering is a rare strengthener. It braces us up, and opens our eyes wide and full to the truths of the world, and gives us blood and fibre."

"Yes; when it does not grind us down under its heel of iron, Anna."

"Ah, to be sure! You could not endure much sustained suffering, I fancy, Bonnie."

"I believe you are right there."

"Yes. You are too impressionable—tooimpulsive. You have no tough material in you. You would fall down prostrate under the load, and it would crush your heart and your life out."

"But after all, Anna, I believe that a great part of the gloom which we fancy we find in a thing is brought to it by ourselves. 'All looks yellow to the jaundiced eye,' you know. Now, I think you, Anna, are naturally of a saddened temperament. But I generally contrive to find a bright side to things—or, at least, to find a glimmer of hope through some stray chink or other."

"It is well for you, Bonnie. Yes; what you say is true. I wish I had the gift at command of discovering even the smallest chink at times. But I have—hush! did you hear a sound?"

"No; nothing but the wind and the sea. Why? why, Anna? Did you hear anything?" Bonnie asked, in a whisper.

"I suppose it was only a fancy; but I thought I heard a faint distant sound like singing. It was the wind I'm sure. It is getting very late, Bonnie."

"Let us be going. A nice spot, I'm sure, we've selected for our talk. Can you scramble down here? I think the readiest way would be to shut our eyes and roll down like two tipsy sacks of flour. What do you think, Anna?"

"Your simile is certainly most suggestive

and elegant. But, for my part, I shall endeavour to remain on my feet as long as I can."

"Down we go, then! One, two, three, and away!" cried Bonnie, seizing Anna's hand and sliding from her sitting posture. "Why we are a famous pair. Here we are safe and sound," she added laughing; and indeed they had arrived at the bottom of the hollow with no graver damages than a powdering of the fine white sand in their hair.

"How lovely these are!" said Anna, now, for the first time, taking heed of the pretty pink and white shells which here and there strewed the sand. "I cannot find it in my heart to leave them unpillaged, Bonnie. Goodness knows when we shall find ourselves here again."

"You may make your mind entirely easy on that point, so far as my company is concerned, anyhow," said Bonnie; "I certainly won't venture again into this melancholy place in a hurry."

- "Well, then, I won't go away until I gather some of these shells. I shan't be long, Bonnie. Won't you come and help me?"
- "Indeed I won't, I'm sure, do anything of the kind. Gather shells indeed, at this hour of the evening! Anna, my good friend, have you taken leave of your senses, may I ask?"
- "You may ask nothing of the kind, madam! If you won't help me to pick them, do not at least add insult to injury, but go your way rejoicing. Jokes aside, Bonnie, I shan't keep you long waiting—since you will not help me."
- "Very well then. Don't delay. I shall wait for you just outside here at the opening into the Burrow. I feel choked up here. You can whistle, you know, when you're ready to come."

Bonnie made her way across the parched sand until she came out on the coarse shingle of the open beach. The salt sea wind blew strong in her face, and already she felt the weight which had lain heavily upon her while

in the Burrow wonderfully lightening in the bracing buoyancy of the fresh briny air.

By this time the gloaming had gathered deeper, and the long line of sand was becoming obscured in the grey-purple dusk. The tide was rolling in nearer and nearer upon the shingle, and the white wreaths of foam glimmered here and there through the shadows. What with the advancing tide, the loneliness of the spot, the deepening purple of the twilight, and the shrilly pipe of the winds, it was small wonder that Bonnie began to feel somewhat uneasy, and extremely anxious to set out briskly for home.

"Anna! Anna! for goodness sake come on," she called at last. "If you don't come, you may stay," she added, with irrefutable logic.

There was no reply. Bonnie, thinking that the wind had carried away her voice, turned and walked back to the opening of the Burrow; then, much to her surprise, she saw that Anna was not where she had left her. "Anna! Anna!" she cried, "where on earth have you hidden yourself? My goodness!" thought Bonnie, "she must have made her way into the second hollow. She will be lost in the Burrow as sure as Fate. Anna! Anna! Anna!"

Still no reply. No sound save the whistle of the wind, the thunder of the advancing sea, and the hoarse roar which came, through lulls in the blast, from the Bar of Clane—an arm of the sea with a sand-bank in the centre—at the far side of the Burrow.

Could it be possible, Bonnie was thinking, that Anna had really lost her way in the intricacies of the lonely Burrow, now darkening in the gloom of twilight? Well, if so, she would come out on the far side of the beach near to Clane Bar. Once out of the Burrow she would, of course, find her way round easily enough to the spot where Bonnie was awaiting her.

But then, on the other hand, had she lost her way merely, or was there any other elucidation of her sudden disappearance? Bonnie was beginning to shiver a little, and a chilly dread was creeping over her. Her fears had taken as yet no tangible shape, which vagueness made them all the more agitating.

An unaccountable dread withheld the girl from entering the shadowed hollow between the hills of sand. She stood at the opening, her fears momentarily gathering and blackening, as the minutes passed, her heart now beginning to throb heavily, her face growing whiter and whiter.

She strove to reason with herself, to impress upon her shuddering consciousness that all was right—that Anna was safe—that there was in fact no cause for this gathering agitation. Vain effort! In such moments a resistless force thrills us through and through, absolutely ignoring reason, establishing itself in all its bleak horror within us with the stern might of conviction.

How long Bonnie stood there at the opening she knew not. She seemed rooted to the spot, every faculty of her body concentrated in her gaze which was strained and wild in its effort to pierce the now thick twilight. But the gloom baffled her. She saw nothing but the great walls of sand glimmering grey and indistinct, and appearing to loom higher and higher as the dusk gathered down.

A sudden dismay overcame the girl, and she crouched down upon the dry sea-weed at the mouth of the Burrow, her hands clasped across her knees, her heart now beating with a sound which she could hear.

She felt her limbs become powerless; her face was damp with a cold perspiration. The unaccountable mystery of Anna's disappearance terrified her. It did not seem to be a natural occurrence. It was so sudden, so silent, so absolutely without clue. There was something in it that well-nigh stunned the girl—something sinister, supernatural, eerie.

And now again—so fitful are the fluctuations of hope and despair within us—the Vol. 1. thought flashed into her mind that Anna had, perhaps, made her way to the opposite side of the Burrow, and was even now coming round by the sands to the place where Bonnie had promised to wait for her. This thought was reinvigorating. Bonnie again called loudly—

"Anna! Anna! Anna! I am here, dear. I am waiting for you. Anna! Anna!"

Almost instantaneously with this cry a sound came to Bonnie's ears—a sound that paralyzed her with horror. A woman's scream piercing and prolonged, partly drowned by distance and by the clamour of wind and wave.

There was no mistaking that cry. It rang through the uproar of the winds with an unmistakably human tone.

But whence did it come? Whose voice was it? Was it—could it be—Anna's?

"O, merciful God, grant not!" Bonnie gasped, rocking herself to and fro where she crouched low on the shingle. "O, Anna,

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Anna—it cannot be. O, God, in His mercy forbid!"

She had not physical strength sufficient to raise herself from the earth. A paralyzing weakness bound her down. She felt a choking sensation in her throat, and the beat of her heart rang in her ears with a muffled thud—thud—thud.

There was no repetition of the cry. Five minutes passed. Storm and sea united the thunder of their voices in one deafening uproar. The hoarse growl and crash of the waves over the Bar of Clane sounded now and then with a deeper boom—a hollow undertone of sullen wrath.

And now another sound came to Bonnie's ears; a prolonged whistle ending with a peculiar shake and turn which she very well knew.

The sound struck a sudden vitality through her limbs. She rose tremblingly to her feet, then stood still for a minute and listened.

The whistle came again, nearer this time;

and now a man's figure was dimly visible in the dusk coming rapidly along the beach and whistling loudly as he advanced.

At the same moment that Bonnie distinguished this figure, she also was seen; for the man hurried his pace to a run, and called out in his full ringing voice—

- "Bonnie! Bonnie! Is that you, Bonnie!"
- "O, Bob!" she gasped, staggering towards him, the pent-up dismay and horror of her heart now finding utterance at last. "I—I can hardly speak. I am terrified. O, thank God you are come. I think I am going mad."
- "Bonnie, Bonnie, what is the matter? What has happened to you? Has anyone frightened you? I came to meet you. Norah told me that you and Miss Wylde had gone along the cliffs for a walk, and I have been searching for you high and low for the last couple of hours. Good God, child! you are white as a ghost!"
 - "Something has happened, Bob-some-

thing must have happened," Bonnie gasped hoarsely. "O, I heard her scream. I'm sure it was her voice. And she's gone—she's gone. I heard her scream, I tell you! It is ringing in my ears now!"

"Whose scream, Bonnie? What did you hear? Tell me all, Bonnie, my darling." He had his arm about her now, and he felt the violent shudder which shook her from head to foot. "What has frightened you like this, child? Tell me, Bonnie, tell me."

"Anna—Anna—that scream—I heard it —I—"

Her voice died away in a long shuddering sigh.

"Bonnie, Bonnie, what's the matter!" cried Grace, endeavouring wildly to lift her drooping head and to look into her eyes. "Bonnie, is there—Good God! she has fainted!"





CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE SEA GAVE UP.



GLORIOUS July day. Such a day as poor Alexander Smith described

when-

Is toying with the shore, his wedded bride;
And, in the fulness of his marriage joy,
He decorates her tawny brow with shells—
Retires a space to see how fair she looks—
Then, proud, runs up to kiss her! All is fair—
All glad, from grass to sun! . . .

A beautiful, joyous day,

When winds are high, And wanton in the happy sky.

And surely the sky is happy, to-day, beyond all power of words to tell. Skylarks are singing volubly far up in the blue warm air, fleecy curls of silvery-white cumulus cloud lie back delicately against the azure skies, and the long line of the coast stretches away, away in the blinding light, and melts into the pearl and shell-pink and opal hues of the horizon.

The sea is as blue as the reflection of summer skies can make it. Where the brown and black-green rocks jut out, the blue water is churned up into white glittering foam, and flakes of this are floated out upon the water only to be driven in again upon the rocks. All the briny air, up here on Liskeelan Head, where sit Bonnie Dunraven and Robert Grace, throbs and trembles with the "low melodious thunder" of the ocean.

Bonnie has been very silent for the last half-hour or so. She is not unconscious of the beauty of her surroundings. She is drinking in thirstily the glorious hues of the changeful sea, the sheen of the bright silvery cloudlets sailing across the blue, the fresh salt life-giving breezes which play upon her face, and sing in her ears.

She has changed somewhat since we saw her last. She has grown paler, and there are dark circles under her eyes. Since the evening—the never-to-be-forgotten evening, now nearly three months ago—of Anna Wylde's sudden and unaccountable disappearance, Bonnie has mourned, day and night, with all the passionate sorrow of her warm impetuous nature, for her lost friend and companion.

No clue whatever to the mystery of Anna's fate has been discovered. The police have failed to find out the truth. The Rabbit Burrow and the shore beyond have been carefully searched with a view to the finding of any foot-prints, or marks of a struggle in the sand. But on the night of Anna's disappearance the rain fell in torrents, so that every trace was obliterated. Advertisements in the South of Ireland newspapers have led to nothing. The dangerous arm of the sea, which runs inland alongside of Clane Bar, has been dragged. All to no purpose.

The secret of Anna Wylde's disappearance is a secret still.

Through all this time of sorrow—through the bitterness of the magisterial investigation, and the pangs of hope and despair alternately piercing the girl's heart, the one thing which saves Bonnie from breaking down altogether is this:—She will not harbour the thought that Anna is dead. No matter how forcibly circumstances may seem to point to this dreadful conclusion, she will not allow herself to look the thing straight in the face, and consider it as a reality. She clings on wildly still to the hope that Anna is alive.

At times, to be sure, she finds herself pondering over a question which, do what she may, staggers—for the moment—her fond belief. If Anna were really alive is it likely that she would leave Bonnie in the agony of suspense as to her fate? This thought recurs with a gathering significance and horror. It haunts Bonnie's sleep. It

rushes in upon her mind, strive as she may to repress it. As she sits alongside of Bob Grace on this beautiful July day, it is again before her mind, coming and going like the shadows of the wind over the sea.

"You are very silent, Bonnie. You don't seem to care for talking to-day. Shall I read something for you? I see you have brought a book."

Grace was gazing into her face as he spoke, a wistful look in his kind, blue eyes.

"Yes, I brought a book, Bob—one of Norah's books—though, indeed, I don't know why I brought it. I think it must have been in absence of mind. I never can read much while sitting over the sea like this. But if you read a few of these old ballads for me I shall be delighted to hear them."

"What are they? Oh, I see—'The Legendary Ballads of England and Scotland.' Was it you that pencilled the margins, Bonnie?"

"No. It was Norah, I dare say. She never reads anything without having a pencil in her hand. She loves these ballads. I've seen her crying bitterly over some of them. They are singularly beautiful—that is to say, the Scotch ones are. Read 'Edom o' Gordon' first—will you, Bob?"

Grace gladly complied. What would he not do, indeed, to afford Bonnie Dunraven pleasure? He read well—with genuine feeling, slowly, earnestly, impressively. He sympathized with his subject. Bonnie was thrilled as she listened.

Reader, have you ever read the ballad of "Edom o' Gordon?" A more despairing, tragical, pitiful story was, I think, neverpenned.

It fell about the Martimas,
When the wind blew shrill and cauld,
Said Edom o' Gordon to his men,
"We maun draw to a hauld.

"And whatna hauld sall we draw till, My merrie men and me? We will gae to the house o' the Rodes, To see that fair ladye." The ladye stude on her castle wa', Beheld baith dale and down; There she was ware of a host o' men. Cam riding towards the town.*

"O see ye not, my merrie men a', O see ye not what I see? Methinks I see a host o' men— I marvel wha they be,"

She ween'd it had been her ain dear lord, As he cam riding hame; It was the traitor, Edom o' Gordon, Wha recked mae sin nor shame.

Gordon strives ineffectually to prevail upon the lady to be false to her lord, and to come down to him and be his "bride."

> "I winna come doun, ye fause Gordon, I winna come doun to thee; I winna forsake my ain dear lord, That is see far from me."

Enraged at this, the traitor sets fire to the house, and the flames mount up to the "castle wa'," where the nurse and "babies three" have sought refuge.

In this terrible strait the lady is deserted by her old servant, who goes over to Gordon's side.

^{*} A farm-steading, or residence.

'And e'en wae worth ye, Jock, my man! I paid ye weel your hire; Why pu' ye out my grund-wa-stane, To me lets in the fire?"

"Ye paid me weel my hire, lady, Ye paid me weel my fee; But noo I'm Edom o' Gordon's man, Maun either do or dee."

O then outspak her youngest son, Sat on the nurse's knee; Says, "Mither dear, gie owre this house, For the reek" it smithers me."

Then comes the reply—the outburst of anguish immeasurable, straight from the riven heart of the mother.

"I wad gie a' my gowd, my bairn, Sae wad I a' my fee, For ae blast o' the wastlin wind, To blaw the reek frae thee!"

O then outspak her dochter dear—
She was baith jimp and sma—
"O row me in a pair o' sheets,
And tow me owre the wa."

They row'd her in a pair o' sheets, And tow'd her owre the wa; But on the point o' Gordon's spear She gat a deadly fa.

The grim traitor, in the midst of his fell work, looks down upon the child lying there

^{*} Smoke.

dead on the grass, and his heart is touched; for even he, you see, had a human heart beating in his body, after all.

> O bonnie, bonnie was her mouth, And cherry were her cheeks; And clear, clear was her yellow hair, Whereon the red bluid dreeps.

Then wi his spear he turn'd her owre, O gin her face was wan! He said, "You are the first that e'er I wish'd alive again."

He turn'd her owre and owre again,
O gin her skin was white!
"I might hae spared that bonnie face
To hae been some man's delight.

"Back and boun, my merrie men a',
For ill dooms I do guess;
I canna look on that bonnie face,
As it lies on the grass!"

And so at last they all ride away, leaving the lady and her two bairns in the midst of the fire; and now "her ain dear lord" comes "owre the lea," only to find his home tottering in the flames, and his "ladye and babes" burned to death.

But he has his vengeance—that grim, relentless, complete vengeance—so distinctive a feature in the old Scottish Ballads.

And after the Gordon he has gane, Sae fast as he might drie, And soon i' the Gordon's foul heart's bluid, He's wroken* his dear ladye.

And mony were the mudie† men Lay gasping on the green; For o' fifty men the Gordon brocht, There were but five gaed hame.

Grace closed the book, and laid it on the grass beside him, and there was silence for a while between the two.

"I am sorry, Bonnie, you asked me to read that," he said, at last. "It is a terrible—a terrible ballad. What is the good of reading the like? It can only have the effect of needlessly paining one. And you, on the contrary, want something to cheer you, Bonnie."

Bonnie's eyes were full of tears.

This old ballad—composed so long, long ago, founded on an event which actually occurred, indeed, more than three hundred years ago, with its rude construction and

^{*} Revenged. + Stalwart.

strange dialect—had, nevertheless, by sheer dint of the human nature and genuine passion and power which burned in it, struck home to the girl's heart, and filled her eyes with tears.

"Please, don't close the book, Bob," she said, taking up the volume from the grass, and handing it to him again. "These ballads have true poetry in them. For my part, I would place them high above the trumpery mixtures of unmeaning words, coined epithets, jingling phrases, and rant, which, in these days, go by the name of 'poems.' What is a poem if it has no soul—no human feeling—no big heart beating in it?"

"True. But these ballads are too despairing. And do you really wish me, Bonnie, to read you more of them?" Grace asked, as he turned over the leaves of the book.

"I do—that is, if you have no particular objection yourself, Bob?"

"'Objection', Bonnie!—when you wish it?" he said, and again the wistful look was in

his blue eyes, the look which Bonnie either could not, or would not, see.

Forthwith he began to read again. He read "Helen of Kirkconnel," and "Annie of Lochryan," and then, as a variety after those pitiful ballads, he turned to "Geordie," and, finally, "The Heir o' Linne."

"You have done me good, Bob," Bonnie said, taking the book from him at last. "I shall remember this day as being a peculiarly happy one. You have given me very great pleasure."

"I wish I knew how to give you pleasure, Bonnie. I wish I could make all your days pleasant ones, and all your memories happy memories. But what is the use of wishing, after all."

"Why not, Bob? Why should we not wish for things? The next best thing to having what we desire is to wish for it."

She was speaking absently, not thinking very much of what she was saying, her eyes wandering far out over the sea.

"Wishing is so barren a thing at times, Bonnie. It wears us away, saps our strength and courage, and life is withered and crippled for us for ever more. Hope deferred, you know, maketh the heart sick—ay, and the brain, too, for that matter. One cannot live on wishes. I know," he broke off suddenly, pulling his straw hat down over his eyes, "I cannot."

She looked down at him for a moment where he lay on the grass a little below her, his powerful muscular figure clad in grey tweed, his crisp yellow hair curling about his head under his straw hat.

And as she looked, she sighed. But she said nothing.

Grace heard the sigh, and he pushed back his hat and again raised his blue eyes to her face. Their eyes met; hers, very sad and earnest, and, somehow, unlike Bonnie's eyes, he thought; his, full and brightening with a dawning hope. But, alas! for his hope. For it was the veriest delusion, a de-

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lusion rose-coloured with fancy's tints—no more.

"Bonnie," he said, softly, still looking up at her. "Bonnie!"

She moved her fingers uneasily among the blades of grass, and sprays of trefoil beside her; then she looked down again at him, and now there was a sadder earnestness in hereyes.

"I am not quite myself to-day, Bob," she said, never removing her eyes from his upturned face; "but we shall have many a happy day yet, I hope, you and I together, here on this dear old Head."

"I was on the point of saying a great many things, Bonnie, just now—I suppose it was a selfish impulse. Well, I shall spare you—for a while longer."

There was bitterness in his voice now, but Bonnie scarcely heard what he was saying. She was looking out over the sea, and was watching dreamily a seagull flying low over the ocean. The pure white wings

were flashing out from the silvery surface; for the sunshine flooded the sea, and every ripple was fringed with light. Bonnie watched the gull until the white wings seemed to blend with the sun-gleams on the distant surface.

"I wonder," said the girl, partly to herself, "where that gull is going to. Some far away lonely little nook, I fancy, where the huge rocks tower all round, and the wavelets ripple in upon the shingle. Some spot where men do not come, and where the seabirds hold full sway, undisturbed by anything grosser than their own wild, pure Oh, dear! what a life they lead! They have always the music of the deep sea. In summer-time it sings a holiday song, full of tender murmuring melody and rippling Then in autumn and spring the beauty. music changes; and there are deep harmonies. wild minor passages, and sobbing, sighing undertones of infinite pathos. But in winter it is surely far otherwise. No softness

then! No melody! Grand, crashing, stupendous harmonies, wild and thrilling, and full of passion." Her voice rose, and her eyes glowed. "It is like the voice of God in His anger then, and the rocks defy its might, and mock and scorn its wrath!"

And so on and on Bonnie's thoughts found utterance. It was really a spoken reverie; and persons who live much alone, or in the Past, and are thrown back on introspection—as she had been thrown, full bitterly to her cost, of late—are prone to this.

By-and-by they stood up, and strolled along the cliff-path until they came to the old stile which brought them out upon the steep little road leading down to Liskeelan Strand. At the other side of this little road (which branches off the highway) there is a second stile, and beyond that the cliff-path continues its winding and irregular course.

A pair of lean and weary-looking horses were dragging two great cart-loads of sand up the steep bit of a road from the strand.

The air was cool and wooing down here. Bonnie and Doctor Bob walked across the shingle to the edge of the sea.

Liskeelan Strand is small, and grassy cliffsenclose it in a rude semi-circle. The sands are covered with shells and pebbles, and small rounded rocks, some of them dark green with "bottle-ore," others of a bright grass-green with a soft hair-like seaweed.

Tiny wavelets were breaking in playfully on the shore. Bonnie observed how the sun-gleams sparkled on their summits immediately before they broke into a foamy crest; then, when they had broken, how the sun sparkled in a thousand gem-like reflections in the hollows of the incoming wavelets; and when the curved summit hid the hollow part of the wave, how the sun flung myriads of diamonds on the crystal foam of the falling crest.

A fresh breeze was blowing in from the sea. Away to the right of Bonnie and Doctor-Bob, rising high about the rough jagged cliff-

tops, was the sombre grey old tower of Liskeelan.

"I am afraid, Bob, you found me a tiresome companion enough, up there on the
hill," Bonnie said, with some compunction in
her voice. "I don't know how you have
patience with me at times. I shouldn't have
such patience, I'm almost certain, if I were in
your shoes, for example."

"You are not altogether yourself these times, Bonnie. Of course I see that plainly, and that explains everything. Such a shock as you received on that dreadful evening," he added, hurriedly, "is not easily got over. It affects the nerves for a long time after—to one of your temperament, Bonnie."

He did not like to touch on this topic, knowing full well how agitating the recollection must still be to this sensitive, warmhearted girl.

"I don't think I shall ever get over the shock, Bob," Bonnie said, her eyes cast down upon the shingle. "It was too—too over-

whelming. I shudder when my mind goes back to that evening. Bob, it would kill me outright, I think, if I thought seriously that Anna Wylde were dead. Thank goodness I have that hope still to live on."

"But, Bonnie child, don't you know that sooner or later you must look the thing straight in—"

"Stop! Stop! Don't say any more, Bob," she cried, catching him by the arm, her face growing paler and paler. "I know what you would say. But I cannot bear it. I tell you, Bob, I cannot believe that Anna is dead. I cannot allow myself to believe it. O, I could not face that possibility!"

Grace was silenced, and profoundly impressed. Until this moment he had never fully known the depth and strength of Bonnie Dunraven's love for her lost friend.

They were walking slowly along by the margin of the sea. The tide was rising, and the little pools in among the rocks were filling with sea-water.

As they walked on, Grace suddenly caught

sight of something lying on the wet sand—something which had apparently been carried in by the incoming tide.

It was not a bit of seaweed, surely. What was it then?

It was still some yards ahead of them; but now, as they drew near, Grace, with a thrill of horror, sudden and intense, saw clearly what this small object actually was.

A bracelet of dark plaited hair, fastened with a silver clasp.

"Bonnie! Bonnie!" he cried, suddenly pointing wildly back towards the little road leading to the strand, "who is that—that man gazing over the cliff—there—there—look!"

Bonnie started violently, and followed the direction of Grace's finger, which was shaking like a leaf in the wind.

- "Where, Bob? Where? I see no one," she gasped, perplexed.
- "Look, Bonnie, look. Just at the top of the cliff. Keep your eyes fixed there! I saw a man—surely."

And as Bonnie looked in vain for this apparition which had so startled her companion, Grace stooped forward and caught up hastily the hair bracelet with the silver clasp, which he thrust wildly into his pocket.

"It must have been only a fancy of mine, Bonnie—Yes; surely it was a mere fancy. It was nothing else," he said, but his face was now white, and his voice broken.

"But, Bob, you seemed so startled. Are you sure you—"

"Hush! Hush! Don't talk of it," he interrupted, with ill-suppressed agitation in his face and manner. "It was only a fancy of mine. Don't bother your head about such rubbish. I ought to be ashamed of myself. Come, let us forget it. How—how cool it is down here, Bonnie."

He was strongly agitated still. And with good cause. That hair bracelet with the silver clasp was no unfamiliar object to his eyes. He had seen it last on a woman's wrist; and that woman was Anna Wylde.



CHAPTER XII.

PAUL EARNSCLIFFE.

BOUT a mile inland from Kilcarrick is situated the secluded country churchyard of Drumkyle. The ruins of the old church are in the centre, and ancient hawthorn and elder trees cluster thick about the ivied walls. The arches still remain, and when you step in under the first one—originally the entrance to the chapel—you behold the old stone altar which bears upon the upright slab a Latin inscription with the date 1623.

The ruin is long and narrow; the hawthorn and elder trees are matted together overhead; and when you look down along the ruined aisle, under the cool green roofing of leaves and branches, the perspective of the old arches—with their festoonery of ivy and their growth of lichens, and brown and grey moss—is singularly beautiful.

All around this old churchyard lie fields of waving corn, now ripening in the July sun. There is a dreamy murmur of the breeze through the whitening ears of the barley. There is a ceaseless buzz of busy insect life all day long.

A populous calm of tender sound, Of leaf and insect, fold, and herd, And wild birds revelling all around.

Here and there, amid the fields and trees, the blue-slated and brown-thatched roofs of snug farm-houses and cabins make pleasant bits of colouring in the landscape. And away to the south of Drumkyle—away beyond the barley fields and the hedges of hawthorn and furze—is the blaze of the summer sea, its sunny blue surface dotted over with white sails, the deep azure of its hue fading to a paler blue until sky and sea meet, far away

there, in dreamy tints of rose-colour and pearl.

This old churchyard of Drumkyle was a favourite retreat of Bonnie's during the slumberous July weather. She would come of an evening after study hours and sit on a grassy mound within the ruined aisle, gazing dreamily through the arches at the far blue line of the sea. As she sat here in the unbroken solitude of the spot, she would fall a-thinking at times of her lost friend, and again the agitating question would trouble her mind "If Anna were alive would she suffer Bonnie to remain in ignorance of the truth?"

This thought chilled her blood. Hope shuddered and shrank back when brought face to face with this unanswerable question.

Bonnie was sitting here one evening toward the end of July. She had brought the "Legendary Ballads," and was listlessly enough turning over the leaves and reading a stanza or two, here and there, where Norah's discriminating pencil had marked energetic appreciation.

She came, by-and-by, to "Binnorie," or "The Cruel Sister," as Sir Walter Scott calls it, and over the heading of this ballad Norah had written, in big letters, "I love every line of 'Binnorie.'"

Bonnie smiled a little as she read this unqualified statement, then she began to read the old ballad, at first in a careless way, enough, but soon with a deepening interest, and a deepening pain.

> There were twa sisters lived in a bower; Binnorie, O Binnorie; There cam a Knight to be their wooer, By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

He courted the eldest wi' glove and ring, Binnorie, O Binnorie; But he lo'ed the youngest abune a' thing, By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

The eldest she was vexed sair,
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
And sair envied her sister fair,
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

The elder sister invites the younger to come down to the "river strand," and, seizing her opportunity, pushes her into the water. "O sister, sister, reach me your glove, Binnorie, O Binnorie: And sweet William shall be your love; By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie."

Vain entreaty! The cruel sister replies-

"Sink on, nor hope for hand or glove, Binnorie, O Binnorie; And sweet William shall better be my love, By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

"Your cherry cheeks, and your yellow hair, Binnorie, O Binnorie; Had garr'd* me gang maiden evermair," By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

And so the current sweeps away the younger sister until she is seen at last by a miller's daughter, who forthwith cries loudly to her father—

"O father, father, draw your dam!
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
There's a mermaid or milk-white swan,
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie!"

The miller hasted and drew his dam, Binnorie, O Binnorie; And there he found a drowned woman, By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

Ye couldna see her yellow hair;
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
For gowd and pearls that were sae rare;
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

^{*} made, compelled.

"Sair will they be, whae'er they be, Binnorie, O Binnorie; The hearts that live to weep for thee!" By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

A harper chances to pass that way and seesthe drowned lady lying there, and sighs and moans as he looks upon her youth and beauty.

He made a harp o' her breast bone;
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
Whose sounds would melt a heart o' stone,
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

The strings he formed o' her yellow hair; Binnorie, O Binnorie; Their notes made sad the listening ear, By the bounie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

He brought the harp to her father's hall; Binnorie, O Binnorie; And there was the court assembled all; By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

He laid the harp upon a stane, Binnorie, O Binnorie; And straight it began to play alane, By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

"O yonder sits my father, the king, Binnorie, O Binnorie; And yonder sits my mother, the queen; By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

And yonder stands my brother Hugh,
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
And by him my William sweet and true;
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

But the last tune that the harp played then, Binnorie, O Binnorie; Was, "Woe to my sister, false Helen!" By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

Bonnie raised her eyes from the book with a long sigh; then she started, uttered a low cry of surprise and gladness, and the book fell from her hand.

Right opposite to where she sat, in the cool shadow under one of the arches, a tall man was standing, and gazing straight into Bonnie's startled face. Too well she remembered those wild black eyes, that lean browned face, the silky dark hair under the black felt hat.

"I may come again," he had said, as he leaned in over the window-seat of the Orchard Room on that wild March evening.

Well, he had come again. He was now crossing the grass-grown aisle toward the spot where Bonnie was seated.

"Miss Dunraven, is this really you," he said, in his lowest tones, and Bonnie again heard the pleasant foreign voice which had

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haunted her many a day and night. "You were sitting so quietly here when I peeped in that I thought—upon my word—you were something belonging to the other world, until you looked up. And how have you been ever since? It seems, to me, a long long time since you gave me that cup of tea!"

He was standing before her, her hand in his. He was looking down into her face, for she had not risen. He saw that she was painfully agitated; for her face had become crimson first and was now pale, her lips were twitching nervously, the hand which he held trembled in his.

"I have startled you, Miss Dunraven. I came too suddenly upon you. You did not expect to see me here. Perhaps you thought you would never see me again, indeed. But I said, did I not, that I would come again? I think I said that."

"Yes; you did say it," Bonnie said at last, the colour returning slowly to her

cheeks; "but, somehow, I had not thought to see you so soon. I was reading here. It is a favourite spot of mine. The view of the sea is so lovely, and, you know, one is so utterly alone here."

She was striving to talk lightly, to disguise the emotion which thrilled her. But her effort was an unsuccessful one. There was something legible in every line of her face, audible in every tone of her voice, flashing in every glance of her eyes, which no mere words could cover.

"Yes," he said, still in the same low voice, "you certainly have chosen a charming spot for your readings. Everything favours you here; sound, odour—that salt sea breeze is invigorating—view, everything. I don't think I've been here before. What hoary old arches! And what a beautiful glimpse of the blue sea over there beyond the barley-fields."

He, too, was speaking with an effort, and a strong one. He was exerting himself to the

utmost to do away with Bonnie's nervous uneasiness. And yet how glad he felt that the girl had not received him with any commonplace exclamations of common-place surprise.

"When did you come?" she asked him, after some minutes; and now he was leaning against the ruined wall near her, his hat pushed a little back from his forehead.

"I came very late last night, and arrived at Castle Strange just as they were locking up the doors. I have been knocking about here all day in the hope of—may I say it?—in the hope of seeing you. I wanted," he added, "to again thank you for your kindness on that evening last March. I have often thought of it—I have often gone over the happy little scene, word for word, since then."

"You really over-rate absurdly what you call my 'kindness,' Bonnie said. "Why, I did nothing in the world but give you a hint or two as to the road to Castle Strange. As for the cup of tea," she added, with a nervous

little laugh, "you know you wished for a glass of water, and surely it would have been frigidly inhospitable of me to have offered you such a thing."

"You gave me more than a cup of tea, Miss Dunraven. You gave me a happy living memory to bring away with me. I have treasured it night and day, and every day, since then."

Their eyes met for a moment as he spoke, and Bonnie saw, with a pang, that the man was changed since that March evening. Yes; unmistakably he was changed. He had grown thinner, and the hollow look about the wild black eyes was more remarkable than ever. She saw, too, that his tall lithe figure was worn, and slightly, very slightly, stooped about the shoulders.

This man was, you would say, of about two-and-thirty, though he looked, at times, some years older; but this premature age was caused, you conjectured, by bodily illhealth, or, perhaps, mental anxiety. There was an indescribable charm in his voice and manner, and this charm—together with the dark thin face all lighted up and living with its glorious black eyes, the tall figure clad in very dark grey, and the white teeth flashing under the heavy moustache—so fascinated the girl that she succumbed, almost unconsciously, to a dreamy complete happiness which thrilled through her every fibre and spoke in every lineament of her face.

- "I hope you found your friend near Lismore very well. Did you really walk all the way?" Bonnie asked, after a pause.
- "I really did. And I found my friend very well indeed. She happens, by the way, to be my only sister."
- "Your sister! How glad she must have been to see you."
- "Yes; she and I were always very fond of each other. She always gives me a genuine caed mille fealta when I appear at her place. She is leading a lonely life enough, poor

thing. She is a widow—a childless widow. Not a particularly joyful mode of existence."

"No, indeed. I wonder you do not spend more of your time with her," Bonnie said, glancing up at him. "She must be drearily lonely. I don't know how in the world I should manage to get through life if I were living in an empty house with nothing particular to occupy me. I don't think I should hold out for a month."

"Well, you are spared that, you see, Miss Dunraven. You have a lot of little cousins, haven't you?"

"Three children and a girl of fourteen. And then, you know, I teach them during the day, and we have studies in the evening, so that I have no very wide margin of time to make myself miserable in."

"Well to be you, Miss Dunraven! Now I, for example, find the margins of time well-nigh illimitable. Pity it is that we cannot preserve, all through our lives, the fresh

vitalizing gladness and courage, and unquestioning reliance of our youth—

O Life! how pleasant is thy morning!

Pleasant, indeed, was mine long ago. I sometimes find myself looking back, looking back, and the contrast between what was and what is, shocks me. I wish the years had never gone by since that summer day I met you with the basket of shells, below under Liskeelan Head."

"Poor dead summer-day," Bonnie said; "it is gone the way of so many others. But, after all, what is the use of living in the past? The past was, in reality, not so beautiful an epoch as we fancy. Distance colours it, don't you see—gives it a romantic glamour, and hides all the ugly angles. We look away over a landscape, and we see what we think is a charming little cottage nestling among old trees. Well, now, if we actually go on to that cottage, what do we find? Why nothing more nor less than a tumble-down cabin,

most likely, with half-a-dozen poor hungry little children in the door-way, and two or three poor old trees mourning in all their leaves over the unpleasantness of their situation. When the past was present, did we find all the astounding advantages which we now regret? I think not!"

"But you forget one thing, Miss Dunraven. You forget that it is in ourselves the change mostly lies. We are not as we were. We have become hardened, keen-sighted, unsympathetic. We have laid aside ideals. Even the real—though Heaven knows it is bad enough!—we distort and deride, and look at with 'jaundiced eye.'"

"I deny that—absolutely!" Bonnie said at once. "Why should we become hardened or keen-sighted (in your sense of the word) or unsympathetic? Why should not our better feelings—our higher selves—ripen and become still higher with our growth? Your theory would make a drove of cattle of us—nothing better. Yes—a drove of dumb,

stupid, soulless cattle—sheep and cows—nomore!"

The stranger was now smiling as he watched Bonnie's heightened colour and sparkling eyes. All this was singularly pleasing to him. There was something freshening in this girl's face, and voice, and words—something that was bracing and reviving to his jaded spirit as a salt wind blowing in from the sea.

"Well, well, well," he said laughing, "we shan't quarrel over it. I think, Miss Dunraven, you will make me a disciple to your creed before long. But you must take pity on me—won't you?—for a while, and not be too rigid. I think you will open my eyes to the truth. I may not look back regretfully on the past, after all."

He was looking down into her face as he spoke, and he saw that the meaning of his last words had not escaped her. Her colour had deepened just a little, and she kept her eyes steadily fixed upon the long grass at her feet.

"I suppose it is only the creed of all of us who believe that life has both meaning and beauty. I think those who find life a hollow unreality, and whose watchword is, that everything is flat, stale, and unprofitable, are, as a rule, either wilfully blind or wilfully false to themselves. They either do not see because they will not see, or they do not hear the 'still small voice' because they will not hear it. It comes to the same thing, you know."

Then she suddenly looked at him—as no woman, except his sister, had ever looked at him before—with steady earnest eyes which, without the slightest alloy of coquetry, or boldness of any kind, gazed straight into his for a minute, in a way that thrilled him.

"Well, Miss Dunraven?" he asked her at last, a smile trembling about his lips; for indeed the situation was a novel one to him.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she replied, withdrawing her eyes at once in some con-

fusion. "I have satisfied my vanity—or, whatever you please to call it—at the expense of politeness. I will confess the truth. The thought suddenly occurred to me that you were, perhaps, only laughing at me for my fine speeches, and then I looked at you to find out whether you were or not."

"And what did your shrewd scrutiny tell you, Miss Dunraven?"

"I haven't arranged my impressions as yet," she said, standing up briskly as she spoke; "some other time I may, perhaps, tell you. And now I must be getting home. It is very late. Dear me!" she added, looking at her watch—a present, by-the-way, from the old Doctor to his sister, poor Grace Fitzgerald, long ago—"it is seven o'clock. I had no notion it was so late. Good evening, Mr.—Mr.—"

Then she broke off and burst into a ringing laugh.

"You don't know what to call me?" he said, his dark eyes fixed upon her bright happy face.

- "No. How should I?" she replied, laughing. "The notion of our talking away for the last half-hour, quite unceremoniously, and my not knowing your name!"
- "Well, you shall know it now. My name is Earnscliffe, Paul Earnscliffe. When, I wonder, shall we meet again?"
- "I suppose you will make a stay at Castle Strange?"
- "Yes; perhaps for a week. May be longer. It all depends on—circumstance."
- "Oh, we shall meet then, of course," Bonnie said. "And now really I must go. Good evening, Mr. Earnscliffe."
- "I thought perhaps you would allow me to walk home with you?" he said, detaining her hand for a moment in his.
- "But I don't intend to 'walk' home at all," replied Bonnie, withdrawing her hand and preparing to go. "I have just about eight minutes at my disposal before tea-time, and I must manage to get back to the house, and take off my hat in that space of time;

so that I shall have to run for it. Good evening, for the third time, Mr. Earnscliffe. Au revoir!"

Paul Earnscliffe, standing under one of the old arches of the ruin, watched the girl's tall figure until it disappeared round the turn of the road. And even when Bonnie had gone out of sight, he was still gazing, gazing; but now he was staring into vacancy, and his eyes had a dreamy look in them, an expression shared by his whole face.

This girl had a charm for him such as he had never found in any other woman before. Was it her freshness, frankness, simple straightforwardness, and warm-heartedness, that won him? Or, had their casual meeting, long ago on Liskeelan Strand, given a romantic zest and colouring to their meeting now?

Earnscliffe was one of those radically weak men who love to analyze their emotions. He was impressionable to a degree of almost effeminacy. The whim of the hour swayed him pitilessly; and even his good points—for he had good points, bear in mind—were cruelly nullified by a temperament which first satisfied its cravings, and then bethought itself of remorse.

Earnscliffe had little or nothing in his varied character in the way of self-sacrificing nobleness, or tenseness of purpose. He loved his ease; not in an obstinately selfish way, however, paradoxical as the statement may, at first sight, appear.

He was—in his way—good-hearted; hated to see any human being suffering; and if, during his walks, twenty persons appealed to him for charity each day, he could not, I believe, refuse alms to any one of them. But, at the same time, if, by crossing a field, he could manage to avoid any of these people, you may be sure this is the very course he would adopt.

His sympathies were wide-spread, but only surface deep. High and noble instincts the

man really had; but whenever his better nature endeavoured to be true to these instincts there was always an ugly lot of little obstacles to be got over, and Earnscliffe constitutionally shrank from obstacles, just as he used to shrink, long ago, from those terrible periodical doses of salts and senna which his good mother had judged indispensable necessities of life.

This man's desultory fancy had now been arrested by the freshness and genuineness of Bonnie Dunraven; or else by the charm of the associated circumstances distinguishing his acquaintance with the girl. He was not sure wherein the secret of her power lay hid. He was not sure of himself, nor how far this newest fancy of his had penetrated. He was not sure of the future—whatit would or would not bring forth. Most of all was he in doubt as to what his own modus agendi should now be.

And so he dismissed the knotty subject from his thoughts, and—like a great many more

of us, strong and weak alike—soothed his conscience by the reflection that, after all, it is a fruitless labour for a mere human being to attempt to map out the future; and that what is variously called trusting to circumstance, chance, or destiny, is, in fact, the wisest course to adopt.

So Paul Earnscliffe, from this July evening forward, succumbed very gracefully to Fate, and Fate—nothing loth—carried him along on its current, and drifted him to his doom.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE ROAD TO EAGLE CRAGS.

BOUT this time the small mistress of Kilcarrick was turning over and over in her busy little brain a certain project which when it had arrived at a satisfactory maturity, she submitted to the Doctor himself.

"Do you know what I've been thinking of, Hugh?" she said, one day, coming in to the Doctor's study, where he sat chuckling appreciatively over a paper in the Saturday Review. "Now make up your mind not to throw cold water on my suggestion."

"Oh, I see, Mary. You want to secure a victory by anticipation. Well, out with your gigantic scheme for the reformation of society

—or, maybe, you have views tending to the civilization of the Maoris."

- "Maybe so, indeed," she said, standing beside the table and smiling very pleasantly; "at present, however, we shall waive those matters. I was thinking of a picnic, Hugh. Bonnie, poor child, really wants something to rouse her. She is not the same Bonnie since that terrible affair about poor Miss Wylde. And the weather is so beautiful just now. And I can manage it very nicely -only a few people, you know. The Osbornes, and the Talbots, and the L'Estranges, and Bob and ourselves. That would be quite enough."
- "And where do you think of going to, Mary?"
- "Oh, somewhere near the sea, of course. I've been thinking of Tinnarush—or, perhaps, if it wouldn't be too far, Hugh, Eagle Crags. It is a charming spot. There is a level bit of grass, just big enough for our dinner table, right under the crags, you know.

and the sea is below us, and I am sure the whole place along there is all abloom with the purple heather now."

"But Eagle Crags is nearly fourteen miles away. However, that is not too long a drive in such weather as this. Very well, Mary; do as you like, my dear. But don't knock yourself up by too many preparations, and that kind of thing. For my part, I think the great charm of a picnic lies in its being a somewhat rough-and-ready affair, got up on the spur of the moment, you know, and all that."

"So it does, to be sure," said the little woman, delighted in her heart at her success. "I don't intend, Hugh, to have anything very grand—and that. What do you think of this, now?"

And forthwith she treated the Doctor to a complete list of the proposed dishes and removes, which catalogue she recited with an unhesitating fluency, ending off with a triumphant little, "There, now!" and an emphatic nod of her head.

"Oh, upon my word, Mary, that will be very nice, indeed. Faith it will, Mary. Really very nice. It couldn't be nicer. Why you are a wonderful little piece of goods altogether!" he added, his kind eyes full of good humour.

Mrs. Fitzgerald lost no time, you may be sure, in bringing her pleasant little project into execution. It so happened that all who were bidden to the feast promised to come, and when the day arrived there was happily neither rain nor yet too intense heat. It was indeed a magnificent August day, with a fresh breeze blowing, just sufficient to temper the heat of the sun. Mrs. Fitzgerald, having left no stone unturned in the way of making her picnic all that a picnic should be, now felt her spirits rise with that most buoyant, perhaps, of all human emotions—the consciousness of labour rewarded.

Bonnie Dunraven and Norah, together with little Rosa and Master Freddy, had crammed themselves into the pony-phaeton fully an hour-and-a-half before their elders started from Kilcarrick.

Robert Grace had, indeed, petitioned eagerly to be allowed a corner in the phaeton, but he had to content himself finally with a place on the side-car beside Mrs. Fitzgerald.

So Bonnie and her little cousins drove away in the beautiful August morning—away along the lonely white roads where the tall hawthorn and dog-rose hedges were now beginning to glow with their scarlet hips and haws. All the country was laughing under the happy blue sky, perfectly blue, save where, coming up with the light wind,

the sailing clouds went by, Like ships upon the sea.

The fields and uplands were opulent with the yellowing corn, darkening where the breeze passed over its wavy surface, then raising its ears again with a low murmurous sound. Up along the sunny hill-sides the cloud shadows chased one another over the short green aftermath. The low banks along the road-sides were overgrown with the beautiful wild flowers of the early August; the graceful blue hare-bells ringing an inaudible peal in every light gust, the ox-eyed daisies, the sweet-scented golden-rod, the rose-coloured convolvulus, and, here and there, some late blossoms of the tall creamy-tinted meadow-sweet filled the air with fragrance. And, coming and going, now hidden for a time when the road dipped and the fields were high, now fully revealed again in the happy sunshine, was the sea, with, here and there, the white sails of fishing boats glancing like silver wings against the deep pure blue.

"Are you sure you know the way, Cousin Bonnie?" Master Freddy asked, suddenly. "Because I fancy we are going wrong. I don't remember that big hawthorn bush there."

"Don't you, indeed?" said Bonnie. "May I ask when you were at Eagle Crags last, young sir?"

"We brought Miss Quinlan to see the place one day last—last—I forget, Cousin Bonnie. I think, though, it was last July twelvemenths."

"Yes, so it was," little Rosa put in—she always made it a point to clinch Freddy's statements with corroborative testimony—"the reason why I know is, because Miss Quinlan got a new bonnet that very morning, and grand'ma coaxed her not to wear it, but she did wear it, and, mind you, it began to rain on our way home, and—"

"Oh, Cousin Bonnie, if you saw the look of it when she got back!" Master Freddy broke in here; "the feathers were twisted out of all shape, and the colour of the ribbons and things was washed out in streaks of blue all over the crown of the bonnet. You never saw such a sight!"

"And I hope I never may," said Bonnie, laughing. "It was really too bad. I'm sure I hope we shan't have rain this evening. What on earth shall we do, Norah, if we

have rain? Our grand new hats—and all!"

And very pretty hats they were, indeed, and by no means calculated to withstand a wetting. Big sun-hats of grey muslin, with wreaths of wild flowers—poppies, daisies, and forget-me-nots—intermingled with ears of corn and feathery hair-grass twisted around the crowns. They were tied down at each side with bands of grey ribbon, and the wide leaves came low over the foreheads and brows in a singularly picturesque and becoming manner.

Bonnie looked particularly well on this happy August morning. Her bright hair was gathered up daintily—but not too tightly—under the big hat, and her pretty grey muslin dress fitted her to a nicety. She seemed to be in the gayest of gay spirits. The prospect of the day's merry-making filled her with delight. And in each one of her rose-coloured anticipations one figure stood out prominently in the immediate fore-

ground. Were not all her joyful fancies, indeed, called into being by this one figure? She had met Paul Earnscliffe three or four-times since that evening of their rencontre in Drumkyle Churchyard. He was prolonging his stay at Castle Strange from week to week. He was to be one of the party to-day at the picnic, and herein lay the secret of Bonnie's unmeasured gladness.

Bonnie will never, in all her years, forget her drive to Eagle Crags on that beautiful August morning. Every sight and sound and odour added to the gladness of her heart. The long white roads winding in and out through the rich verdure of the country; the red-brick chimneys and brown-thatched gables of farm houses "bosom'd high in tufted trees;" the broad fields of yellowing corn waving in the sunshine; that old, grey windmill over there on the upland, standing out with its drab sails in relief against the blue background of the sea: when, in long years to come, Bonnie closes her eyes and:

falls a-thinking, all those pleasant sights will come up again before her mind almost as vividly as she saw them now under the happy skies.

By-and-by, there was a sudden shout from Master Freddy, and a clapping of hands from little Rosa, and now they had come to a turn of the road, and lo! there was the chosen spot at last, within a quarter of a mile of them.

- "I believe we are the first arrivals, after all," Bonnie said, as they drew nearer and nearer to the sea. "Oh, no, though!—there is a phaeton on before us."
- "That is the Mullinderk phaeton," said Norah. "Yes. Don't you see Harriet Talbot's blue bonnet? She wore that the day she came to see you, Bonnie."
- "Oh, indeed, she did! And I see Janetta has that exquisite green hat with the red feather. I wish to goodness we hadn't come so soon, Norah. But I thought Tiny would not travel so well."

Bonnie was by no means overjoyed, as you may guess, at the prospect of the Misses Talbot's society. Perhaps there was a little bit of disappointment mingling with her chagrin. She may not have recognised the Mullinderk phaeton at first, you know, and possibly she had her own views as to the occupants thereof.

And now the Mullinderk vehicle had drawn up, and here were the two Talbot girls "swinging along the road" (so Bonnie said sotto voce for Norah's benefit) to meet the Kilcarrick pony phaeton.

"We are the first comers—only think!" Harriet exclaimed, as they drew near. "I thought our clock was awfully slow—I know it used to be—and I hurried Jan out of the house in a most unceremonious fashion. And I'm awfully afraid we've come too early, after all. What an exquisitely lovely day, Miss Dunraven! I think the view here is so deliciously charming, and I always said so, though Mr. Teeling—don't you remember,

Jan?—could never see any beauty in it; at least, he used to say so, but I really think it was merely for the fun of rousing my ire! Ha! Ha! He was such awfully good company, Mr. Teeling! Of course he was dreadfully satirical and all that—oh, perfectly dreadful, Miss Dunraven! You can't imagine. I'm sure I don't know how in the world any girl could have the pluck to marry him; and yet—lo, and behold you!—he was married last spring, wasn't it, Jan?—last April—no! May—no; April—wasn't it?"

"The twenty-fourth of May, Harrie," replied Miss Janetta. "Don't you remember mamma's saying that Aunt Polly was married on the same day twenty-six years ago?"

"Yes—yes—yes! To be sure! To be sure! What a dreadfully treacherous memory I have! I have no memory for dates at all, Miss Dunraven. I sometimes say the most outlandishly ridiculous things, and I'm sure people who don't know me well must think—must think—ha!—ha!—I'm

taking leave of my senses! Ha! ha! And it's all because of my defective memory. A terrible thing not to have a good memory. Jan, now, has a capital memory. Yes, Jan—you know you have, now! (for Miss Janetta, unassuming virgin that she was, had interposed at this juncture a mild expostulation). You always had a good memory, Jan. You take after poor papa. But I am more like mamma's people. They all had positively outrageous memories. Have you a good memory, Miss Dunraven?"

"I think my memory is about up to the usual standard, Miss Talbot," replied Bonnie, smiling quietly; "I have not an exceptionally good one, nor yet a very bad one."

"I envy you! I do, upon my honour," said Harriet, hardly waiting for the end of Bonnie's speech. "Now, when I was at school I never could remember an event nor a date—especially a date—in English history. O, dear me! I don't know how on the living earth I endured the perfectly dreadful

manner in which the girls used to make a butt of me, at times. And I couldn't help it. I really couldn't. At one public examination I was asked, I remember, to tell all about the—the what d'you-call-it?—Magna Charta, you know—and—and—what's this I said, Jan? Upon my word I forget. But I know it was something actually awful."

"You said, Harrie, that it was a scheme for the blowing up of the Parliament House in London, got up by Praise God Barebones, in the year of grace, 1215."

"Yes! yes! Praise God Barebones! I always had a weakness for him!" screamed Harriet, her portly frame shaking and writhing with a sudden explosion of laughter. "O my goodness!—yes, to be sure! How the superioress did cough and sneeze, and twist herself into the most ridiculously uncomfortable attitudes, and how the girls tittered in the background, and there was I, like an abnormally scarlet peony, bearing the brunt of hundreds of astounded eyes!"

"You must have had a good deal of moral courage, at all events, Miss Talbot," said Bonnie. "Now I think I should have rushed off the platform altogether, had I been in your shoes."

Miss Talbot was drying her eyes—for laughter always affected her lachrymal glands—and smoothing her red hair—both girls, by-the-way, had abundant tresses of rich unmixed red—and hitching her blue bonnet to the correct angle. Bonnie had, of course, brought Tiny to a standstill during this pleasant little colloquy.

"Moral courage? Well, I think I always had that, more or less; so has mamma, and, as I say, I take after her people. Now, Jan hasn't half as much of that kind of thing. I have the advantage of her there. Yes, Jan, it is the truth! You are dreadfully timid at times, and so was poor papa. Would you believe it, Miss Dunraven, papa was afraid of the cat? I suppose it was constitutional, and all that, but it seemed so outlandishly

silly. Poor papa. He was always so awfully - Jan! who are those?" she exclaimed, abruptly, as a handsome open carriage now made its appearance round the turn of the road, followed immediately by the Kilcarrick side-car.

They are "Oh, I know now. L'Estranges," Harriet resumed hastily, before Miss Janetta had had time to frame a reply. "What a handsome turn-out they have. Mrs. L'Estrange has such surprisingly good taste. She was painting pictureswasn't she?-or something of that kind. when Mr. L'Estrange married her. I really forget the story; but I think it was something deliciously romantic, you know, Miss Dunraven, and that kind of thing. Someting about— O, Jan, look!—look! There is the duck—the pigeon—in grey! Look! He is sitting beside Mrs. L'Estrange."

"Who may the 'pigeon in grey' be, Miss Talbot?" Bonnie asked, but the wave of colour in her cheeks seemed to argue some VOL. I.

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apprehension of the subject of Harriet's gushing phraseology. "Oh!—do you mean Mr. Earnscliffe?"

"Yes; isn't he a dote? I do so love that style of man. Just like Dare Livingstone, you know, or Guy Stamer, or that pigeon in 'Comin' Thro' The Rye."

"I suppose you mean 'Guy Livingstone' and 'Dare Stamer,' Harrie?" suggested Miss Janetta of the capital memory.

"And what did I say, Jan? O, yes to be sure! How ridiculous of me! Of course I meant— I declare he has got down. He is looking. (Jan, is my bonnet straight?) O, my goodness, Miss Dunraven, he is coming towards us. His eyes are fixed on your hat!"

But Bonnie was not by any means anxious that Earnscliffe should come toward her just now. Perhaps she scarcely relished the anticipation of a possible *tête-à-tête* cruelly destroyed by the presence, on the scene, of the gushing Harriet and her sister. By

whatever motives impelled, the fact was, at all events, that Bonnie administered a slight touch of the whip to Tiny's glossy grey flanks, and was soon being conveyed briskly along the road, leaving the Miss Talbots—much to their inward flurry—mistresses of the situation.





CHAPTER XIV.

"O MERRY MY HEART, YOU HAVE GOTTEN
WINGS OF LOVE."

HEN one goes to the trouble of preparing the viands for a picnic, selecting a suitable scene of action, and inviting the guests, it is at least to be expected that one will be repaid in some measure for one's labour by having one's efforts crowned with decent success.

Can any human being—above all, a painstaking little woman—be supposed to preserve courage, or even ordinary patience, when, on the very day of the event, the skies blacken, and the rain begins to fall? Such endurance is not within the compass of any mere mortal woman here below. Why, even the fact that the cork-screws have been forgotten is in itself a staggering thing enough.

But when a picnic goes through its several stages without hitch or flaw of any kind—coming up, indeed, singularly near to that fond ideal which has glimmered for the previous week or so upon the mind of the mistress of ceremonies—then, truly, there is a harmony in the whole thing, a tidal wave of satisfaction surging around the cloth from the entertainers to the entertained, and back again, and gently washing away all incoherent particles in its course.

Precisely such was the state of affairs on this happy August day, as the guests gathered in various picturesque (or otherwise) attitudes about the big tablecloth under the shelter of the crags.

The spot chosen for dinner was a broad level plateau midway down the cliff-side, and arrived at by a somewhat steep and winding foot-way leading from the heath above. This plateau is covered with thick grass and trefoil, and is shut out from the world by the crags behind, and the sea in front. In the late afternoon the place is gloomy enough, for then the shadow of the crags is cast over the grass as the sun slopes westward. But, just now, nothing could be more delightful than the chosen spot; for the strong, fresh sea-breezes tempered the heat, and the sunshine flooded the place, drawing out the odour of the trefoil, and glancing on the glasses, knives, and spoons in myriads of stars and diamonds.

And then the crags—how beautiful they look, up there against the warm blue sky. Their slopes and crannies are overgrown with the deep purple heather, tufts of late yellow trefoil, and long spear-grass waving in the breeze.

The eagles have deserted those purple crags long ago. Nothing but their name remains now. But as you lie here on the heathery slopes and look up to the summits.

all flooded in the yellow sunshine, you feel how perfect would the picture be if a great golden eagle were soaring far up there against the radiant skies over his eyry.

It is a secluded, beautiful spot for a long drowsy summer day's reverie. Nothing disturbs you here. The wash—wash of the wavelets over the shingle below croons a lulling undertone to your thoughts. The deep purple of the heather, stretching away over the crags and cliff-tops, soothes the dreamy eye. The briny savour of the sea is the air,

And drowned in yonder living blue The lark becomes a sightless song.

"Mr. Teeling, of happy memory, must have had singularly bad taste if this spot failed to please him," Norah remarked, in a low voice to Bonnie.

"Maybe Mr. Teeling is only a 'Mrs. Harris,' after all, Norah. I wish to goodness," added Bonnie, "all this feeding

process were over. To my mind this is the only drawback to the day's enjoyment.

Perhaps we may find some excuse, if we look into the thing, for this very unsocial remark. Bonnie may not have been altogether pleased with her situation just now. She was wedged in tightly between Mrs. Osborne and Norah, and the men were occupied either in carving or tumbling into hampers of wine and glass. The lemonade and soda-water corks were popping noisily on all sides, and the clink of carving knives, clatter of plates and dishes, and pleasant accompaniment of voices and laughter. blended together with somewhat deafening effect. On the whole, therefore, Bonnie's patience was sorely tried, and we may consider her something of a martyr at this particular period of her life.

At last, however—much to her inward satisfaction—the heavier portions of the feast were got through, and the fruit made its appearance. And now as they all sat on the

grass—the running hither and thither of the men being at last over—somebody proposed singing, a proposition promptly seconded and carried.

Bonnie's eyes glowed, and her spirits rose again at this suggestion. She had a passionate love for music—a love which was not merely accidental, bear in mind, but inherent in her nature as the sap in a tree. Music exerted a powerful sway over the girl. It thrilled her with delight—unbounded delight—and could, on the other hand, sadden her to tears. Her heart seemed to beat time to the cadences of her favourite airs; and she had many favourites. But most of all did she love the beautiful old melodies of Ireland and Scotland.

And now Robert Grace—always only too anxious to make himself agreeable—was singing "The Hundred Pipers." He had not very much voice, but such as he had he made the most of. His blue eyes glanced at Bonnie as he began the spirited old ballad.

That glance said, as plainly as blue eyes eversaid anything, "I am singing 'The Hundred Pipers,' Bonnie, because you like it." Bonniewas pleased at this, and smiled back cordial approval.

Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
We'll up an' gi'e them a blaw, a blaw,
Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
Oh, it's owre the border awa', awa',
It's owre the border awa', awa',
We'll on, an' we'll march to Carlisle ha',
Wi' its yetts, its castles, an' a', an' a'.

The music sent an electric thrill through Bonnie's heart. She could not analyze—indeed she had never tried to analyze—the effect which these Scottish airs exerted over her. Now, this song was, surely, not a pathetic one, and yet why should there be something remarkably like tears in Bonnie's eyes?

Grace was singing away loudly. What a fine picture is given of Bonnie Prince Charlie in the third stanza—

Oh, wha is foremost o' a', o' a',
Oh, wha does follow the blaw, the blaw?
Bonnie Charlie, the king o' us a', hurrah!
Wi' his hundred pipers an' a', an' a',
His bonnet and feathers he's waving high!
His prancing steed maist seems to fly!
The nor' win' plays wi' his curly hair!
While the pipers blaw wi' an unco flare!
Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a', &c.

By this time they were all joining in the chorus, and right merrily they did it. And now what an abundance of humour—genuine humour, "like sunshine on the deep sea,"—overflows the concluding stanza—

The Esk was swollen sae red and sae deep;
But shouther to shouther the brave lads keep,
Twa thousand swam owre to fell English ground,
An' danced themselves dry to the pibroch's sound.
Dumfounder'd, the English saw, they saw—
Dumfounder'd, they heard the blaw, the blaw!
Dumfounder'd, they a' ran awa', awa',
Frae the hundred pipers an' a', an' a'.
Wi' a hundred pipers an' a', an' a', &c.

"Bravo! Bob, my boy!" cried Doctor Fitzgerald, his kind old face all lighted up as he spoke. "Why, Bob, you have excelled yourself. I never heard you to such advantage before, boy."

"You musn't flatter me, sir," said Grace.

"And now I suppose I have a right to call on somebody." He was smiling across the cloth at Bonnie. "Now, Bonnie, won't you give us one of your Scotch songs?"

"Oh, do, please, Miss Dunraven," Mrs. Osborne added, in a politely persuasive voice. "I think you sing so sweetly, and you articulate your words so prettily! Listen now, Lucy and Minnie, dears," she said, in an undertone, to her two little girls. "Miss Dunraven is going to sing. Try now and benefit by it. I am always telling you both that you sing too quickly, and that you don't articulate your syllables distinctly."

Perhaps it is not the most agreeable of preliminaries to an amateur singer to hear her excellences thus publicly canvassed, and to feel that the articulation of her syllables is about to be carefully observed. Bonnie was, however, far too happy, just now, to allow any such considerations to stagger her. And so it is to be hoped that Lucy and

Minnie reaped a fat harvest on this occa-sion.

Bonnie sang "Haud awa' frae me, Donald," and her rich mezzo-soprano voice did full justice to the tender plaintive melody—

Haud awa', bide awa',
Haud awa' frae me, Donald;
What care I for a' your wealth,
Or a' that ye can gi'e, Donald?
I wadna leave my Law-land lad
For a' your gowd and gear, Donald,
Sae tak' your plaid, and o'er the hill,
And stay nae langer here, Donald.

My Jamie is a gallant youth,
I lo'e but him alane, Donald;
And in bonnie Scotland's isle
Like him there is nane, Donald.
He wears nae plaid, nor tartan hose,
Nor garters at his knee, Donald;
But, O! he wears a faithfu' heart,
And love blinks in his e'e, Donald.

Sae haud awa', bide awa', Come nae mair at e'en, Donald; I wadna break my Jamie's heart To be a Highland queen, Donald.

"That is positively delicious, Miss Dunraven!" cried Harriet Talbot, enthusiastically. "Oh, dear me! I'm afraid all the beautiful old romance and unselfishness are • dying out of the world! We are all getting so dreadfully prosaic and self-seeking in these ridiculously common-place days! What girl, I wonder, now-a-days, would lose the chance of Donald's what's-this-you-call-it?—
'gowdie-gweer,' isn't it? The Scotch words are so funny!"

"Harriet!" said Miss Janetta, in an undertone, "you mean 'gowd and gear.' 'Gowd' means gold, and 'gear' dress or goods, in English."

"I see—I see! I never," continued Harriet, addressing the company at large, "can remember the words of a song. I don't know how it is. And it seems so insanely stupid—pig-headed, indeed, would be the proper term! Now that reminds me, when Mr. Teeling was with us—you remember Mr. Teeling, don't you, Mrs. L'Estrange?" she broke off here to ask.

Mrs. L'Estrange—a washed-out blonde, some twenty years, or more, younger than her lord and master—smiled assent; and Harriet accordingly resumed the thread of her agreeable reminiscences.

"As I was saying, you know, Mr. Teeling—or rather, I didn't exactly say it, but he really was so dreadfully particular about the words of a song. And one evening we—that is, he and I—were singing a duet. What's this it was? 'Flow on, Thou Shining River?' No. 'Let us Dance on the Sands?' No, no, no! What was it, at all? Jan, you know. You have such a good memory."

"Surely, Harriet, you know very well that it was, 'What are the Wild Waves Saying?'" replied Miss Janetta, losing patience just a little at this public declaration of her endowment.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes! Of course it was. Well, Mr. Teeling—who has a positively magnificent voice—had sung his part, Paul, you know, poor little Paul in 'Dombey and Son,' a bewitching book, I think, though Mr. Teeling couldn't read it—at least he said so; but he was always saying the very diametrical

opposite to what I said! He was so awfully satirical! Well, though, I must tell you. It was absurdly amusing! When he had sung his part, there was I suddenly minus the words, and we had no music. So I went on in this fashion as a desperate resource—

La, la, la—la la, la, la, la, La, la, la—la la, la.

Up jumps Mr. Peeling from the piano, and—and," here an explosion of laughter cut the thread of the narrative. "He said—he said—tell it you, Jan! I can't exactly remember the words he used. But they were so ridiculously amusing!"

"What he said is really not worth repeating," said Miss Janetta, now fairly—or unfairly—showing her teeth at last. "He said simply that 'Florence Dombey was never intended to be a jabbering dummy!' Voild tout!" (This with withering scorn).

"A jabbering dummy! Wasn't it rich!" screamed Harriet, convulsed with laughter

while the tears ran down her fat jolly cheeks. "I thought I'd fairly die when he said it! and he looked—he looked—ha! ha! ha!—so desperately disgusted, you know, so—" and another explosion carried away the remainder.

"He must have been a singularly polite man, Miss Talbot," said Bonnie. "And now, Mr. Earnscliffe," she added, glancing quickly across the cloth to where Paul Earnscliffe lay on the grass beside his kinswoman, Mrs. L'Estrange, "now I call on you for a song."

Earnscliffe had been very silent during the repast. His big black eyes had followed every movement of Bonnie Dunraven's with a lingering, jealous gaze. Now when she looked across at him, the lean browned face changed. It broke into a smile—one of the softest of smiles—and the eyes caught up the brightness and flashed back a reply to Bonnie's words.

"You are fond of Irish ballads, Miss Dun-

raven," he said in his low foreign tones, and, without further preface, he began—

I'd mourn the hopes that leave me,
If thy smiles had left me too;
I'd weep, when friends deceive me,
If thou wert, like them, untrue.
But while I've thee before me,
With heart so warm and eyes so bright,
No clouds can linger o'er me,
That smile turns them all to light!

Tis not in fate to harm me,
While fate leaves thy love to me;
'Tis not in joy to charm me,
Unless joy be shar'd with thee.
One minute's dream about thee
Were worth a long, an endless year
Of waking bliss without thee.
My own love, my only dear!

"Well, Paul; that is not the whole of it. There are two stanzas more," Mrs. L'Estrange said, for Earnscliffe had paused in his singing.

"Yes, I know there are," he replied smiling, "but I shall not mind them now. They deal with vanished hopes and that kind of thing. Let them pass. The first two stanzas I like better."

He had sung in a way that thrilled those

who heard. This man was seemingly inspired with the very soul of song, and his rich baritone voice had trembled and throbbed on the air like to the low tones of an organ.

Every word of his song had sent a pang of delight indescribable to Bonnie's heart. Her eyes were lowered to the grass, a beautiful colour had surged into her cheeks. She was hardly conscious, after that, of what was going on around her.

Grace sang a second song, then little Mrs. Fitzgerald herself, and then Bonnie was again asked, and again, and yet again. She did not know the effect of her songs. She sang out from her full, happy heart, and, unconsciously to herself, she was singing as she had never in all her life sung before. Those who heard her on that day were first surprised, incredulous, then deeply impressed. Had these simple old ballads ever before found so thrilling an interpreter of their beauties? She sang "Logie o' Buchan," and

"The Bonnie Breast Knots," but when she began, "And Ye Shall Walk in Silk Attire," her listeners were carried away altogether.

And ye shall walk in silk attire,
And siller ha'e to spare,
Gin ye'll consent to be my bride,
Nor think on Donald mair.
O, wha wad buy a silken gown
Wi' a poor broken heart?
Or what's to me a siller crown,
Gin frae my love I part?

"Bonnie, my dear," Mrs. Fitzgerald said, when the song was over, and there were traces of tears in the little woman's dark blue eyes, "I have never heard you sing so beautifully before—really beautifully. The word is no exaggeration. That was a favourite song of your poor mother's, long ago."

"Many a time I heard her crooning it over, of a summer evening," the old Doctor added. "Poor Grace! But her voice was nothing in comparison with yours, Bonnie."

"It is the greatest pity in the world to have such a voice thrown away on mere ordi nary people, you know, Miss Dunraven. exclaimed Harriet Talbot, with good-natured enthusiasm. "Now, there was Mary Devereux—don't you remember all about Mary Devereux, Mrs. L'Estrange? She was Captain Devereux's daughter, and she sang several times at a concert in London. You see, she and her father had their own private house in Bedford Square, I believe, and she had her own carriage, and she did not mix, of course, with any of the professional singers, and—I forget how many thousands she made one season. Something fearfully enormous—fifteen thousand, I think. Do you remember the amount, Jan?"

- "I think I heard she made two-hundredand-fifty pounds, Harrie."
- "" What a falling-off was there!" said Bonnie; "and I suppose I am to go and do likewise, Miss Talbot? After all, I am not sure that the game would be worth the candle—even if one were sure of success. However, I shall think over your suggestion. It is too good to be thrown away."

Bonnie was talking at random, hardly knowing, indeed, what she was saying. When a girl awakes up, suddenly and but confusedly, to the force of a truth which, she vaguely believes, must now direct the current of all her future life, it is not to be expected that she can—during the first shock of her discovery—have very much attention to bestow upon any matters foreign to this one absorbing fact. She must grasp this thing first ere she can turn her thoughts elsewhere. Bonnie, indeed, did not feel fully conscious of her surroundings until by-andby-half-an-hour or so later, she fanciedwhen she found herself strolling away quietly from the merry-makers who had now taken up their positions in various comfortable attitudes upon the deep purple heather which grows along the top of the cliffs.

She heard their voices behind her grow fainter and fainter, and then, little by little, it all came to her mind, strong, fresh, lifegiving, as "ae blast o' the wastlin' wind."

She loved this man, Paul Earnscliffe. She no longer allowed herself to be blind to this vitalizing fact which, indeed, her consciousness had revealed for some weeks past if she had only looked straight at it and read it. She saw all now. With a glad rush of blood to her cheeks, and a wild bound of her heart, she knew that she loved this man. Could she not now, with Fatima, cry aloud to her spirit—-

And, isled in sudden seas of light, My heart, pierced thro' with fierce delight, Bursts into blossom in his sight.

"O Paul! Paul! Paul!" she said, repeating over and over again, the word which thrilled her like a chord of music. It was the first time she had ever spoken his name aloud.

She had by this time lost sight of the party on the cliffs. She had gone out on the heathery slopes overlooking the shingle below, and here she sat down, with the glorious ocean stretching away before her; with the gulls hovering in the warm air, glancing white against the blue; with the boom of the sea in her ears, and the breeze from the sea playing with her bright hair. For she had unfastened her big hat, and laid it beside her on the heather.

How long she sat here, absorbed in her sudden huge happiness and wonder—for, does not this first consciousness of love amaze and astound us, for a while, as well as delight?—Bonnie never afterwards could tell. She was roused at last from her reverie, or trance, by the sound of a voice which chimed in harmony with her thoughts.

The voice of Paul Earnscliffe himself. No other.

He had come along by the sands at the foot of the crags. He was looking up, looking up. And now he saw her. Their eyes met. He was smiling. He waved his hat and his brown hand, and in his hand he held a wild white rose, the last of the roses of the waning summer.

"I have had a break-neck scramble for

this rose—this poor little white wild rose!" he cried out, as he climbed up the craggy ascent to the spot where Bonnie sat. "I heard you say you were fond of wild roses. This poor little one seems to have outlived her sisters and brothers—

No flower of her kindred, No rose-bud is nigh, To reflect back her blushes, Or give sigh for sigh,"

he sang, as he handed the wild rose to Bonnie, who smiled, and fastened it in her dress.

"Poor little lonely rose!" said the girl, looking down into the white chalice of the flower, with its delicate tinting of shell-pink and its golden heart. "I will take care of you and cherish you. Mr. Earnscliffe," Bonnie added, "I think flowers have souls. I wonder is that an heretical theory?"

She glanced up at him as she said this, and she saw that a quickening happiness glowed in his dark face, and gleamed and flashed in his wild black eyes. He sat down alongside of her on the heather, and laughed a long happy laugh—a laugh that pealed out on the air like to a mellow-toned bell.

"If flowers have souls," he said, "I suppose they have also understandings, and little hearts, too, hidden away somewhere under their soft tender leaves. Perhaps that little white rose is whispering a story to you, now. Listen, and maybe you will hear the whisper. I know what it is, because I have told the little rose my secret!"

When he said this, he looked full into Bonnie's face, and his black eyes seemed to burn into hers.

"Yes, I've told the rose my secret. What was it? You do not ask me, Miss Dunraven. Do you care to hear?"

The girl said nothing. Her lips slightly parted. The colour in her cheeks was deepening.

"Will you sing something for me, Miss Dunraven?" Earnscliffe suddenly said drawing just a little nearer to Bonnie, and still gazing into her face. "One verse of the last song you sang, 'And Ye shall Walk in Silk Attire.' It is ringing in my ears still. Do sing it for me again—won't you?"

A sweet dreamy expression came slowly over the girl's face. She was looking down into the chalice of the flower. There was a pause.

And then suddenly, Bonnie broke the silence. Not by words—they would have jarred—but by song. Her clear beautiful young voice rang out on the air—

And ye shall walk in silk attire,
And siller ha'e to spare,
Gin ye'll consent to be my bride,
Nor think on Donald mair,
O, wha wad buy a silken gown
Wi' a poor broken heart?
Or what's to me a siller cro wn,
Gin frae my love I part?

Her beautiful voice trembled, and for a moment broke down. Her eyes glanced for one second into Earncliffe's. In that quiver of the voice—in that momentary glance, heart rushed to heart. Earnscliffe seized her hands. He bent towards her.

"Bonnie!" he whispered, "Bonnie, my love—my only love—we understand each other at last. O, at last—at last. Bonnie, we love each other. What is the use of keeping it a secret any longer? It cannot be a secret. Nature will not conceal it. Our hearts are speaking to each other. We dare not deny the truth—even if we would. I say we dare not! O, Bonnie, how can I tell you how I love you, my love, my love, my love!"

He saw that her eyes were dim with tears. She was trembling in every limb.

"Bonnie," he went on passionately, "look up at me and tell me, that you love me. Give me one full glance of your eyes—just one glance—only one glance." And the passion surging through him made him wild.

"Paul—Paul," she said then, in a whisper, as she slowly lifted her eyes and fixed them, full of tears, upon his, "Paul, is this only a dream, or are we both awake and alive?—awake, with all this living joy, in

this world which they say is a weary world. Is it true, Paul? Tell me. Is it real?"

"Real and true, Bonnie, darling," Earnscliffe cried, passionately. "Look at the sea before us. Is that real? Look at the skies. Are they real? Do you see that skylark far up there near Heaven? Surely she is not a fancy, and that flood of song is no fairy music."

He broke down with the passion which shook him. His voice dropped to a husky whisper.

"I loved you all my life, my darling. The little girl who gave me the shells long ago on Liskeelan Strand grew, in spite of me, into my heart and my nature. Her influence thrills in every fibre. I have no life but the life you give me. Bonnie," he whispered, drawing her in to his heart with hungry arms, "come to me, my love—come to me—and, if you love me, if you love me as I want to be loved—give me this—give me this!"

The girl's passionate upturned face deepened in colour. Her eyes seemed to dilate and soften with a love and tenderness immeasurable. With a long sigh—a sigh that came up from the very depths of her being—her bright head sank upon his shoulder, and her lips met his.





CHAPTER XV.

"O, MY AMY, MINE NO MORE!"

August evening the picnic party bethought themselves of setting out for home. A gipsy-tea had been duly prepared and keenly relished—how delightful it was, to be sure, to be half-sitting, half-lying amid the deep purple heather, in the mellow evening glow, sipping one's tea out of the dear old-fashioned Kilcarrick! china and now the vehicles were in readiness on the road, and the women were putting on their gloves and "wraps," and Bonnie was busily occupied in packing up the tea-cups in hay, with a view to the prevention of breakage.

Mrs. Osborne and her two little girls had taken flight immediately after tea.

"We are all so very, very apt to catch cold, you know, Mrs. Fitzgerald—miserably so! You have no idea," Mrs. Osborne had said, by way of apology. "I always dread the night air. Lucy, child, wrap yourself up well. I heard you coughing during tea, dear."

"It was only a crumb of the seed-cake that went against my breath, mamma," explained Lucy, in very demure tones.

"Oh, I don't know about that, dear. You are too rash altogether," Mrs. Osborne persisted, shaking her head as she spoke. "And, moreover, Mrs. Fitzgerald, I am extremely nervous when it grows late. I fancy all sorts of things. That melancholy affair of Miss Wylde gave me a shock which I shall never, by any possibility, get over. Come now, dears!"

And so these lively people were gone, and were not, it may be, hopelessly regretted by those whom they left behind.

The Talbots were the next to go, and then,

close on eight o'clock, Mrs. L'Estrange's handsome phaeton rolled away, and Bonnie, bending over her tea-cups, felt that the place had suddenly become a desolate waste—without life, without colour, without interest. She was anxious to get home now. What business had she here any longer? Was not Paul Earnscliffe gone away?

"Why, Bonnie, my dear, if those cups were made of soap-bubbles, there would be no fear of their breaking now," said Doctor Fitzgerald, who, indeed, was somewhat impatient to be off. "Where is this precious box to be put, my dear?"

"I think it will fit nicely in the well of the car, Uncle Hugh," Bonnie replied, laughing. "There, now! There is no fear of any damages. I should never forgive myself if any of these old cups were smashed."

"And now," said Doctor Fitzgerald, some ten minutes or so later, when they were all assembled on the road where the side-car and pony-phaeton awaited them, "now, who are to come on the side-car, and who are to go in the phaeton, I wonder?"

"Why, Uncle Hugh? Where's the obstacle?" Bonnie asked, promptly. "I suppose we may as well do as we did this morning."

"What! You to drive home all by yourself, my dear? Faith, Bonnie, that would be no joke!—that would never do!" said her uncle. "What do you say, Mary?"

"I think we must only coax Norah to come with us, Hugh, and—you, Bob, you will take charge of Bonnie?" added the little woman, turning to Grace, who had waited—with what eager wistfulness he alone knew—to see if Bonnie herself would express any wish on the subject.

"Perhaps Bonnie doesn't care to be taken charge of," he replied, and he was looking away over the fields as he spoke.

The tone of his voice smote the girl. She glanced at him quickly, and then the expression of his face decided her.

"But Bonnie does wish to be taken charge of," she said; "do you want to have me robbed, and, maybe, murdered, Bob, and no one by to take my part?"

"Now, boy, you hear what she says!" exclaimed the old Doctor in great good humour. "Here now, once for all, let us be under way. Come, Mary; up with you. Come, Norah, and you, Meg. I suppose Freddy and Rosa will go with you two, Bonnie?"

It was all arranged finally, and so away they drove at last, in the hush of the August evening.

How still was the country in the gathering gloamin'! Now and then the voices of peasants were borne clear and full across the fields, and the faint music of a violin from some cross-road or other, where a country dance was going on; and, at times, the harsh call of the corn-crake sounded on the air, and the rattle and creak of cart wheels from a distant road-way.

A fresh breeze was blowing. The sky was .

of a tender grey-blue, but toward the west a dreamy rose-flush coloured the heavens, varying, as it neared the horizon, with hues of primrose, lemon, and lavender. There was an odour of wood-bine all along the lonely winding roads where the broad embankments at each side were overgrown with wild flowers and ferns.

It was a pleasant drive.

They came, by-and-by, to a place where four cross roads branched off, and lo! here was a country dance going on—they had heard the music when a long way off—with such fun and spirit that Bonnie felt her feet dancing on the floor of the phaeton, and a strong desire to jump out and join the merry-makers seized upon her. The fiddler—a red-cheeked, black-eyed, arch-looking County Cork "boy"—was scraping away at "The Top of Cork Road," and then, with a preliminary shriek and groan, he began that most bewitching of the Scotch reels, "Mrs. Macleod of Rasy."

How the boys and girls did dance, to be Nobody who has not witnessed an Irish country dance can have any notion whatever of the manner in which the "steps" There is no such thing are executed. tolerated as even a momentary loss of time. The true Irishman has a soul for music. This love is almost a madness, indeed, so relentlessly does it sway its victim; rousing him up to insane good spirits, or depressing him to the extreme of melancholy. Every note is marked by the Irish country dancer. You will see his eyes flash, and his head nod from side to side, as he keeps time to every bar, and each scrape of the violin has a corresponding movement in the shuffle, hop, or rattle of the dancer's shoes while he "humours" the music—as only an Irishman can.

Bonnie was delighted with the picture now presented. The girls were mostly brunettes, and their browned cheeks, wide laughing mouths, white teeth, and arch black

eyes looked charmingly picturesque and gipsy-like under the red kerchiefs which covered their heads. The "boys," too, were comely, as the County Cork peasantry mostly are. Bonnie would have liked to draw rein and linger here for half-an-hour or so, listening to the reels and jigs, lilts and doubles, and watching the dancers; but Grace drove on, and soon they were again in the solitude of the country, and by this time the twilight had gathered thick; and what with the drowsy quiet of the hour, the wooing breeze, and the pleasant warmth of a big rug, Master Freddy and little Rosa were unable to resist the sweet altogether temptation of forgetting life for awhile, and had fallen fast asleep, curled up cosily together in the folds of the rug.

"Upon my word," said Bonnie, laughing, "they are wise in their generation. I hope they won't fall out, though. You can keep your eye on Rosa, Bob, and I will see that Freddy doesn't come to grief."

"Oh there's not the slightest fear of them, for that matter," Grace replied; "there is, I believe, a special Providence for the welfare of people who are asleep, and people who are tipsy. I hope you enjoyed yourself to-day, Bonnie," he broke off abruptly, and without looking at her.

"Yes, Bob. I usually make up my mind to enjoy whatever happens to be 'going.' It is a very good rule—the best social rule I know of, indeed."

"Eagle Crags is a pretty place."

"'Pretty!' Such a word to select! Why, you would talk of a 'pretty' doll!" said Bonnie, with much emphasis. "I consider Eagle Crags a place to dream of—a place to write poetry about—if, only, one could."

"Perhaps," said he, "you might benefit by half-a-dozen lessons in the art. You can have them whenever you like, you know—now."

There was some bitterness in the way he said this, and as yet he had not vouchsafed even to turn his blue eyes to the girl's face.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Bob," she said. She was on the point of adding, "perhaps you will give me a lesson or two?" but her good-nature checked the words on her lips.

"You are usually quick enough then, Bonnie! I am surprised at your obtuseness now. I mean, you know, that that fellow, Earnscliffe, is a good hand at stringing exquisite phrases together—talking about 'dreamy seas,' and 'impassioned twilight,' and 'glints of Heaven between the rifts of clouds,' and that style of thing, you know. And, you know, you can get him to train you whenever you like. It would be a very charming, idyllic sort of thing—Elsie and Prince Henry all over again, by Jove!"

Bonnie was silent for a minute or two—a painful silence. It never so much as occurred to her to say anything sharp or resentful to Grace in return for his amiable speech. She liked him too well, understood his character too thoroughly, sympathized—with a sense

too keen and fine—with his nature, to allow of her treating him in any other but the very kindest way she could.

Grace—waiting cynically, and possibly expecting a hot and excited rejoinder from the girl—was almost startled when Bonnie at last laid her hand upon his arm, and looked up steadily and sadly into his face.

"Bob, why is this? Why is this?" she said, in very low tones. "You and I were always the best of friends—dear, true, unchangeable friends. And now, it seems as if you wished to— No, Bob! I won't finish that ugly sentence. Please God, I shall never have reason to finish it. Why are you giving me all this pain, Bob? You above all others."

"I, give you pain, Bonnie! I, give you pain!" cried poor Grace, turning suddenly round and looking full into the girl's eyes. "You know very well, although you say that, that I—that I—why, I would chop off my right hand, Bonnie, to do you a good

turn of any kind. You know that well. I, give you pain! Good God, child, don't you know that my very heart is tied in you!"

There! It was all out now. No room for any further doubt. Bonnie felt her heart sink within her.

"Oh, Bob, Bob!—O, Bob, I am sorry for this—O, I am sorry for this," was all she could say; and now there was almost a sob in her voice, and her face was pale as death.

"Surely you cannot have been blind to the truth, Bonnie," went on Grace, with ill-suppressed passion. "Heaven knows I never concealed what I felt for you. From the very moment I saw you, that day last February—the day after you came back to Kilcarrick, you know—I knew that we could never be merely brother and sister any more. I knew that I loved you with all my heart and soul. Why, child, you are the first, the only girl I ever loved. All the others may go to Kamschatka, for aught I care. And you were always kind, and affectionate, and

all that, but, O Bonnie, it was only the kindness of a sister, and my heart ached with longing, longing, day and night, that it were otherwise."

Bonnie said nothing. Her hands were clasped tight together across her knees. Her head was bowed. She could not utter a word. But Grace saw how her figure trembled as he spoke.

"And sometimes I thought you were changing, Bonnie; and O my God, how overjoyed I felt at that! It was as if an overpowering weight were suddenly lifted up and cast off my heart. I was a new man. Do you remember that day, last month, Bonnie, when we were on Liskeelan Head, you and I together—the day I read the old Scottish ballads for you?"

"I do, Bob. I remember it well. That was a happy day," Bonnie said, her head still bowed down, her voice low and broken.

"Well, Bonnie, on that day I was on the very point of confessing all. You sighed

once, and I felt that you were looking at me, and then I looked up and our eyes met, and I called you by your name. O Bonnie, if you only knew—if you could only imagine the joy I felt in that minute! It thrilled through every vein like fire in my blood. And then again my hopes sank down, down, down, and I knew it was an accursed delusion-no truth in it, and I was miserable again. And now to-day—to-day, again, I was anticipating a long talk with you, and you see how it turned out! I hadn't a word with you the whole day long. You were away from us all the evening, and that man was with- O, child, I can't dwell on it! Bonnie, for God's sake tell me how is this to end? Am I to go on loving you, and wearing my heart and my life out, bit by bit, day by day? Tell me, Bonnie—tell me."

He had let the reins fall now, and was holding the girl's trembling hands in his.

"Tell me, Bonnie—tell me!" he urged passionately, his blue eyes flashing into hers,

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his straw hat pushed back upon his head showing the crisp curls of his hair.

For one minute Bonnie hesitated. Then her decision was made. Surely, her more merciful course now, was simply this: she would speak out candidly and clearly. It was too late for any specious phrases now, be they never so well intended.

"Bob," she said, looking full into his face as she spoke, "it never occurred to me, even for a moment, at any time of my life, to look upon you in any other way than as being my brother. I always considered you my brother. I was always proud of my brother. fond of my brother. I always loved him, and I love him still, and I am proud of him still. But, Bob-Bob-that other love-the love you want—that is impossible. absolutely impossible. You must put it away from you—far away from you, Bob. Don't examine it at all. Don't bring it so near to vou as that. It can never be, Bob-never, never, never, never."

She had spoken slowly, earnestly, impressively. Had there been any hurry, excitement, confusion in her words, Grace would have still urged his cause. But what could he say to this? Bonnie's eyes were fixed full upon his. She was very pale. She was very much in earnest. And when she slowly pronounced the four words, "never, never, never," it seemed to poor Grace as though she was striking out, one by one, the last faint hopes which had lingered in his heart.

"Is that your decision, Bonnie?" he said, and he could say not another word just then.

He wanted to ask her if that other man occupied the position for which he, himself, so hungered. But he could not utter the words.

"I have told you the simple truth of the matter, Bob," Bonnie replied; "I can say no more. I am sorry for this. I have never felt so sorry, indeed, in all my life before, I think, as I feel now. I might have spoken

differently to you, Bob, less directly, less truthfully. But I think I have chosen the better course. I think you will thank me, afterwards, for this. And—and, Bob, surely this will pass away. We shall be to each other as of old—we—" But there was a hopeless ring in her voice now, in spite of her strong efforts to silence it.

"No, Bonnie; that can never be. That is impossible. There is a breach made between us to-night which will only widen and widen and widen. How could I ever look at you and think that another—No—no! It can never, never be!"

He had taken up the reins again, and they drove along now in silence. There was no word spoken for the remainder of the drive. When they arrived at Kilcarrick, Mrs. Fitzgerald was waiting at the front door to receive them; but Grace said he was in a hurry to get home—he would not go into the house to-night.

"Not come in, Bob!" exclaimed the little

woman, who had seized his arm and was endeavouring to bring him in whether he would or not—Bonnie, meanwhile, had disappeared with the children who were as yet only half awake—"Oh, come now, Bob, do come in. Hugh is waiting for you in the parlour. And, Bonnie, I'm sure will expect—"

Then she paused suddenly, and looked into his face, now clearly visible in the light from the hall.

"Bob, Bob, what is wrong with you?" she asked, her voice dropping to a whisper. "Has anything happened? Tell me, Bob, what is it. Is it anything about Bonnie?"

This little woman had always been as a mother to Robert Grace. She looked upon him as her son, and no mother ever loved a son more than she loved him.

"Don't ask me to-night. O don't ask meto-night!" cried poor Grace, looking down at her for a moment as he spoke. She was shocked at the expression of his eyes. She "o, MY AMY, MINE NO MORE!" 289 had never seen a look like that in them

had never seen a look like that in them before.

"Tell me what has happened, Bob," she urged, standing in front of him, and looking up full into his face. "I shall not ask you to come in, if you don't like to come in. But you can tell me all, out here under the trees. I hate to see that expression in your face, Bob. You are not yourself, tonight."

"Don't ask me anything just now. I am not myself to-night," Grace replied, turning away his head. "I cannot say any more. I must think it all over as I walk home. Goodnight, now. Goodnight. You will catch cold out here, and I cannot afford," he added, looking down at her suddenly, and wringing her small hand, ere he turned away, "I cannot afford to have you ill. You are the dearest, truest friend I have in all the world!"

She drew down his head and kissed him, vol. 1. w

as naturally as a mother would kiss her son finding him in sore trouble.

Then he was gone, and with a heavy heart the little woman went back into the house.

Bonnie, meanwhile, had gone up to her room, and closed her door, and was now sitting on the low window-seat, her hands clasped across her knees, as she thought over the events of this never-to-be-forgotten day. She had not lighted her candle, and the vague semi-darkness of an August night filled the cosy little room.

What a day it had been for her! A day of strangely varied joy and pain. And now, as she sat here alone in the hush of her darkened room, the huge delight which had burst in upon her at Eagle Crags rushed again over her heart, sweeping away, with its resistless current, all the sadness of what had occurred during her homeward drive with Robert Grace.

For joy goes deeper than sorrow. Our

human mechanism adapts itself readily enough to the ways of weeping and gnashing of teeth. We fall into the groove as It is our natural matter of course. heritage in a world which is, in bald fact, a valley of tears. But joy is a comparatively rare visitant, and when it rushes into our souls, every fibre tingles with the novel sensation—every vein expands with the surge of new blood. It is not that we become selfish in our sudden happiness. We are simply carried away beyond self, beyond circumstance, beyond that state of mind when the Past is our unfailing source of sadness the Present, a drag—the Future, a bugbear.

It was so with Bonnie now. She forgot everything save the two all-absorbing facts—that Paul Earnscliffe loved her, and that she loved him. The Past was nothing to her now, save in so far as it had concerned him—the Future was a rose-coloured dream. The

Present was full of a happiness almost too strong to be borne sanely. Verily—

 Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands;
 Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.

Bonnie had sat here for about half-an-hour or so, when there was a knock at her door, and Mrs. Fitzgerald came quietly in.

"What on earth 'are you doing, Bonnie, sitting here in the dark?" the little woman said, in a strangely nervous way. "You cannot be very sleepy, my dear, evidently. I—I have something to say—something to ask you. I am greatly troubled, Bonnie, and you can ease my mind if you like, my dear."

She was standing beside Bonnie, her hand on the girl's shoulder. Bonnie—suddenly recalled from her glowing thoughts—did not know, as well as you and I do, what the little woman meant. She was looking up into her aunt's face in unaffected bewilderment.

"'Troubled,' Aunt Mary? I am very sorry to hear it," she said, in her frank kind way.

"Yes, Bonnie; and I think you ought to know what I mean. It cannot be, I think, that I am mistaken in my suspicions. Bonnie, I think—I am afraid, my dear—you have treated Robert Grace somewhat hardly tonight."

"Not 'hardly,' aunt," replied the girl, promptly, now thoroughly alive to the subject. "I told him the simple truth. I spoke out frankly to him. Surely that was the very kindest way to speak. Would you have me feign what I never never could feel? Would it have been good-natured of me—not to talk of honest-hearted—to have deceived him with false hopes, Aunt Mary?"

"And is it really so, Bonnie?"

"Really and truly so, Aunt Mary. I always loved Bob as a brother; and I always shall, please God. But as for anything else

—that is altogether out of the question, and I told him so."

"Oh, Bonnie, what am I to say, at all! Why, I was building on this—and so was your uncle, my dear. We had your future mapped out, child, and, Heaven knows, we thought nothing could be happier—better, in every way, for you and for Bob—nothing! Bonnie, Bonnie, take care you are not acting on some impulse, my dear, some foolish impulse of the hour?"

"Nothing of the kind, Aunt Mary. I know my own mind thoroughly. I was sorry from my heart for Bob—I was shocked and pained more than I can say. But I feel convinced that I have acted towards him as only a true, affectionate friend and sister would act."

"Oh, Bonnie, my dear, this is a great blow to me. May God direct you for the best! I thought," added the poor little woman, through her tears, "I always thought, my "O, MY AMY, MINE NO MORE!" 295

dear, that you and Bob would be married and settled down near us, and I had built up so many fancies—so many happy fancies, Bonnie—for I love you both from my heart, my dear, and always did. I don't know in the world how I am to break this to your uncle. He will be dreadfully—dreadfully disappointed!"

END OF VOL. I.

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